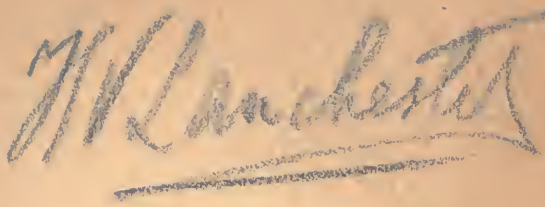

ESTIMATIONS IN CRITICISM

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BY

WALTER BAGEHOT

IN TWO VOLUMES

EDITED BY

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I

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

WALTER BAGEHOT was born in 1826, and died in 1877. A banker, a merchant, and a shipowner, his excursions into literary criticism were of the nature of a leisurely aside, and took the form of articles contributed to the *Prospective Review* and the *National Review* between the years 1852 and 1864. He also made time to act as editor of the latter periodical, in conjunction with Richard Holt Hutton, from 1855 until 1864, when the venture came to an end. In later years he gave his attention, almost exclusively, to economics; and, as editor of *The Economist* and author of a number of technical works, achieved considerable distinction as a political economist.

English literary criticism by way of review article may be said to have begun with the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, and the mode was strengthened and extended on the inception of the *Contemporary Review* in 1809, and the *London Magazine* in 1820. Conspicuous among the early critics were Francis Jeffrey, foremost of the 'Edinburgh Reviewers'; William Hazlitt, whose contributions to the *Edinburgh* commenced in 1814; and Macaulay, whose essay on Milton in 1825 was the first of a series which awakened the interest

of a wider public in the ' intellectual entertainment,' to use Bagehot's phrase, to be derived from the appreciation of literature. The next critical luminary to appear was Matthew Arnold, and he was a contemporary of Walter Bagehot.

If we are to make any attempt to differentiate between the criticism of Bagehot and that of Jeffrey and his successors, it may be maintained with some show of reason that the difference was one of imagination and of technique. These main elements of style manifest themselves in two ways. On the one hand, we have diction—the salient phrase, the right word. On the other, there is tectonic—the composition of the well-built sentence, paragraph, thesis. The one relates more or less directly to the writer's imagination, to his perception of beauty. The other is structural and logical, and is the product of a sense of proportion. In style at its best both elements appear in due measure, but the writings of most men exhibit a deficiency in one or other of these constituents.

If we assess Jeffrey, by way of instance, on the basis of this analysis of style, we find him lacking in imagination. His logic may be unexceptionable, but his phrasing is commonplace, and his judgment—whether correct or not—is stated in hard terms. The rational always received undue emphasis from him: to him ' the finer raptures of poetry were not revealed.'

Turning to Bagehot, we see at once that the position is absolutely reversed. He has not the ghost of an idea of tectonic. For him the rules of grammar and laws of syntax might as well not have existed; his

paragraphing was left to the hazard of the printer's stick; and in no one of his articles did he succeed in saying all that he had meant to say—each lacks proportion and completeness. It follows that he is no trustworthy guide on technical questions of criticism, nor does he offer much commentary in that direction. But what we do find in his style is the nice phrasing and saliency of diction that we have identified with imagination. Bagehot was an imaginative critic if ever there was one, and Pater has gone the length of laying it down that the best sort of criticism is the imaginative—penetrating as it does through the given literary or artistic product into the mental and inner constitution of the producer. This is the characteristic of all Bagehot's estimates, as he called them.

Bagehot was immediately interested in the humanities of literature rather than its æsthetics, and his method was psychological rather than literary. He sought to relate his author with his own observation of men and his theories of life—to extend his acquaintance with great minds in their working. By intuition, *per saltum*, he found his keynote in the personality of the writer behind the book, and sounded this in a formula of classification. A few instances of these keynotes in classification may serve, by way of illustration. Men are either 'perfect' or 'imperfect' in their 'realisations.' There are two kinds of goodness—'the sensuous' and 'the ascetic.' Novels are 'ubiquitous' or 'sentimental.' Intellects are 'subtle' or 'creative.' There are two kinds of education—'the education of facts' and 'the education of speculation.' Men of genius are

divided into 'regular' and 'irregular.' There are many kinds of reader—'the voracious,' 'the subtle,' 'the stupid,' 'the matter-of-fact, or positive.' Scott is great because he has an 'experiencing nature.' He has communed with men and things: observes, enjoys, records. Shakespeare is greater than Scott, because he combines with an experiencing nature that of the reflective solitary who communes with himself. The possession of an 'enjoying nature' made the difference between Cavalier and Puritan.

Thus and thus does Bagehot exercise his critical imagination. Of course, as Leslie Stephen has justly remarked, his classifications do not always bear reflection. Now and again, the reader becomes conscious that essential facts are being ignored or glossed over, in order to make the instance fit the theory advanced; or he feels, at any rate, that one aspect is being emphasised while others are neglected. It must be conceded, too, that the critic's terminology is occasionally quite arbitrary: his formula is not self-interpretative. But, throughout, we are impressed by the fecundity of the writer's imagination; his mind is 'swarming with theories.'

Much might be said about Bagehot's felicitous phrases and wide vocabulary; about his broad views of life, both in its spiritual and in its social aspects; about his keen sense of humour and his 'spirit of mockery.' But these lie on the surface, and they may be left to surprise the reader as he comes upon them. Setting aside analysis, it may be claimed that, if, as Matthew Arnold has put it, the end of criticism is to create a current of true and fresh ideas, Bagehot's essays are full of this sort of sugges-

tion and charm, and deserve a wider recognition than has yet been accorded to them.[1]

C. L.

[1] In this edition, the text is given as it originally appeared in the *Prospective Review* or the *National Review*; or, in some instances, as revised and reprinted in *Estimates of some Englishmen and Scotchmen*, a volume of selected essays which Bagehot published in 1858. Even in the case of the revised articles, and more so in that of the others, the text has been found to be very inaccurate, and to require considerable emendation. Most of Bagehot's quotations from authors cited were far from scrupulous in their verbal accuracy, and in a number of instances it has proved impossible to trace the passage.

It has been considered expedient to adhere to the original text more strictly than other editors have done, and to indicate editorial interference where that has been deemed necessary. In the text, omitted words supplied and necessary verbal emendations have been placed within square brackets, and the punctuation and paragraphing have been brought into conformity with accepted practice. Corrective readings of quotations from poetry are supplied by way of footnote: amendments in prose quotations are placed within square brackets. The annotation of the text has been carried out with the utmost possible care, and the references have, in the majority of instances been traced or collated by the present editor; but it is only fair to acknowledge much help derived from the pioneer work and superhuman industry of the editor of the posthumous American edition of Bagehot's complete works. In every instance in which Mr. Forrest Morgan's reference has been adopted without confirmation, his initials have been appended within square brackets. For the sake of convenience of reference, the contents have been fully indexed.

ESTIMATIONS IN CRITICISM

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.[1]

HARTLEY COLERIDGE was not like the Duke of Wellington.[2] Children are urged by the example of the great statesman and warrior just departed—not indeed to neglect 'their book' as he did—but to be industrious and thrifty; to 'always perform business,' to 'beware of procrastination,' to 'NEVER fail to do their best:' good ideas, as may be ascertained by referring to the masterly despatches on the Mahratta transactions — 'great events,' as the preacher continues, 'which exemplify the efficacy of diligence even in regions where the very advent of our religion is as yet but partially made known.' But

> '[Oh] what a wilderness were this sad world,
> If man were always man, and never child!'[3]

And it were almost a worse wilderness if there were not some, to relieve the dull monotony of activity,

[1] Hartley Coleridge's *Lives of the Northern Worthies*. A new edition. 3 vols. Moxon.
[*Poems* by Hartley Coleridge. With a *Memoir* of his Life: by his Brother. 2 vols. Moxon, 1851.]

[2] This essay was first published in the *Prospective Review* for October 1852, immediately after the death of the Duke of Wellington.

[3] Hartley Coleridge: 'Childhood' (sonnet).

who are children through life; who act on wayward impulse, and whose will has never come; who toil not and who spin not; who always have 'fair Eden's simpleness:' and of such was Hartley Coleridge. 'Don't you remember,' writes Gray to Horace Walpole,[1] 'when Lord B. and Sir H. C. and Viscount D., who are now great statesmen, were little dirty boys playing at cricket? For my part I do not feel one bit older or wiser now than I did then.' For, as some apply their minds to what is next them, and labour ever, and attain to governing the Tower, and entering the Trinity House,—to commanding armies, and applauding pilots,—so there are also some who are ever anxious to-day about what ought only to be considered to-morrow; who never get on; whom the earth neglects, and whom tradesmen little esteem; who are where they were; who cause grief, and are loved; that are at once a byword and a blessing; who do not live in life, and it seems will not die in death: and of such was Hartley Coleridge.

A curious instance of poetic anticipation was in this instance vouchsafed to Wordsworth. When Hartley was six years old, he addressed to him these verses, perhaps the best ever written on a real and visible child:—

> 'O thou! whose fancies from afar are brought;
> Who of thy words dost make a mock apparel,
> And fittest to unutterable thought
> The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol;
> Thou fairy voyager! that dost float
> In such clear water, that thy boat
> May rather seem
> To brood on air than on an earthly stream;
> . . . . . .
> O blessed vision! happy child!
> Thou art so exquisitely wild,

[1] Letter to West, 27th May 1742.

I think of thee with many fears
For what may be thy lot in future years.
. . . . . .
O too industrious folly!
O vain and causeless melancholy!
Nature will either end thee quite;
Or, lengthening out thy season of delight,
Preserve for thee, by individual right,
A young lamb's heart among the full-grown flocks.'
. . . . . .

And so it was. As often happens, being very little of a boy in actual childhood, Hartley preserved into manhood and age all of boyhood which he had ever possessed—its beaming imagination and its wayward will. He had none of the natural roughness of that age. He never played—partly from weakness, for he was very small, but more from awkwardness. His uncle Southey used to say he had two left hands, and might have added that they were both useless. He could no more have achieved football, or mastered cricket, or kept in with the hounds, than he could have followed Charles's Wain or played pitch and toss with Jupiter's satellites. Nor was he very excellent at schoolwork. He showed, indeed, no deficiency. The Coleridge family have inherited from the old scholar of Ottery St. Mary a certain classical facility which could not desert the son of Samuel Taylor. But his real strength was in his own mind.

All children have a world of their own, as distinct from that of the grown people who gravitate around them as the dreams of girlhood from our prosaic life; as the ideas of the kitten that plays with the falling leaves, from those of her carnivorous mother that catches mice and is sedulous in her domestic duties. But generally about this interior existence children are dumb. You have warlike ideas, but you cannot say to a sinewy relative, 'My

dear aunt, I wonder when the big bush in the garden will begin to walk about; I'm sure it's a crusader, and I was cutting it all the day with my steel sword. But what do you think, aunt, for I'm puzzled about it's legs, because you see, aunt, it has only *one* stalk; and besides, aunt, the leaves.' You cannot remark this in secular life; but you hack at the infelicitous bush till you do not altogether reject the idea that your small garden is Palestine, and yourself the most adventurous of knights. Hartley had this, of course, like any other dreamy child, but in his case it was accompanied with the faculty of speech, and an extraordinary facility in continuous story-telling. In the very earliest childhood he had conceived a complete outline of a country like England, whereof he was king himself, and in which there were many wars, and rumours of wars, and foreign relations and statesmen, and rebels and soldiers. 'My people, Derwent,' he used to begin, 'are giving me much pain; they want to go to war.' [1]

This faculty, as was natural, showed itself before he went to school, but he carried on the habit of fanciful narration even into that bleak and ungenial region. 'It was not,' says his brother, 'by a series of tales, but by one continuous tale, regularly evolved, and possessing a real unity, that he enchained the attention of his auditors, night after night, as we lay in bed, . . . for a space of years, and not unfrequently for hours together.' [2] . . . 'There was certainly,' he adds, 'a great variety of persons sharply characterised, who appeared on the stage in combination and not [merely] in succession.' [3]

Connected, in Hartley, with this premature development of the imagination, there was a singular deficiency in what may be called the *sense* of reality.

[1] Cf. *Memoir*, p. xxxiii. n. [2] *Ibid.* p. liii. [3] *Ibid.*

It is alleged that he hardly knew that Ejuxrea, which is the name of his kingdom, was not as solid a *terra firma* as Keswick or Ambleside. The deficiency showed itself on other topics. His father used to tell a story of his metaphysical questioning. When he was about five years old, he was asked, doubtless by the paternal metaphysician, some question as to why he was called Hartley. 'Which Hartley?' replied the boy. 'Why, is there more than one Hartley?' 'Yes, there is a deal of Hartleys; there is Picture Hartley (Hazlitt had painted a portrait of him), and Shadow Hartley, and there's Echo Hartley, and there's Catch-me-fast Hartley,' seizing his own arm very eagerly,[1] and as if reflecting on the 'summject and ommject,'[2] which is to say, being in hopeless confusion.

We do not hear whether he was puzzled and perplexed by such difficulties in later life; and the essays which we are reviewing, though they contain much keen remark on the detail of human character, are destitute of the Germanic profundities; they do not discuss how existence is possible, nor enumerate the pure particulars of the soul itself. But considering the idle dreaminess of his youth and manhood, we doubt if Hartley ever got over his preliminary doubts—ever properly grasped the idea of fact and reality. This is not nonsense. If you attend acutely, you may observe that in few things do people differ more than in their perfect and imperfect realisation of this earth. To the Duke of Wellington a coat was a coat; 'there was no mistake;' no reason to disbelieve it; and he carried to his grave a perfect and indubitable persuasion that he really did (what was his best exploit), without fluctuation,

[1] *Memoir*, p. xxvii.
[2] Carlyle's *Life of John Sterling*: Part I. chap. viii.

shave on the morning of the battle of Waterloo. You could not have made him doubt it. But to many people who will never be Field-Marshals, there is on such points, not rational doubt, but instinctive questioning. 'Who the devil,' said Lord Byron, 'could *make* such a world? No one, I believe.'

'Cast your thoughts,' says a very different writer,[1] 'back on the time when our ancient buildings were first reared. Consider the churches all round us; how many generations have passed since stone was put upon stone, till the whole edifice was finished! The first movers and instruments of its erection, the minds that planned it, and the limbs that wrought at it, the pious hands that contributed to it, and the holy lips that consecrated it, have long, long ago been taken away, yet we benefit by their good deed. Does it not seem strange that men should be able, not merely by acting on others, not by a continued influence carried on through many minds in succession, but by a single direct act, to come into contact with us, and, as if with their own hand, to benefit us who live centuries later?' Or, again, speaking of the lower animals: 'Can anything be more marvellous or startling, than that we should have a race of beings about us, whom we do but see, and as little know their state, or can describe their interests or their destiny, as we can tell of the inhabitants of the sun and moon? It is indeed a very overpowering thought, that we hold intercourse with creatures who are as much strangers to us, as mysterious as if they were the fabulous, unearthly beings, more powerful than man, and yet his slaves, which Eastern superstitions have invented. . . . Cast your thoughts

[1] John Henry Newman: *Plain and Parochial Sermons*, VI. xix.—'Gospel Palaces.' [F.M.]

abroad on the whole number of them, large and small, in vast forests, or in the water, or in the air, and then say whether the presence of such countless multitudes, so various in their natures, so strange and wild in their shapes, is not'[1] as incredible as anything can be.

We go into a street, and see it thronged with men, and we say, Is it *true, are* there these men? We look on a creeping river, till we say, *Is* there this river? We enter the law courts: we watch the patient Chancellor: we hear the droning wigs:—surely this is not real,—this is a dream,—nobody would do *that*,—it is a delusion. We are really, as the sceptics insinuate, but 'sensations and impressions,' in groups or alone, that float up and down; or, as the poet teaches, phantoms and images, whose idle stir but mocks the calm reality of the 'pictures on the wall.' All this will be called dreamy; but it is exactly because it *is* dreamy that we notice it. Hartley Coleridge was a dreamer: he began with Ejuxrea, and throughout his years he but slumbered and slept. Life was to him a floating haze, a disputable mirage: you must not treat him like a believer in stocks and stones—you might as well say he was a man of business.

Hartley's school education is not worth recounting; but beside and along with it there was another education, on every side of him, singularly calculated to bring out the peculiar aptitudes of an imaginative mind, yet exactly, on that very account, very little likely to bring it down to fact and reality, to mix it with miry clay, or define its dreams by a daily reference to the common and necessary earth. He was bred up in the house of Mr. Southey, where, more

[1] Newman: *Plain and Parochial Sermons*, iv. xiii.—'The Invisible World.' [F.M.]

than anywhere else in all England, it was held that literature and poetry are the aim and object of every true man, and that grocery and other affairs lie beneath at a wholly immeasurable distance, to be attended to by the inferior animals. In Hartley's case the seed fell on fitting soil. In youth, and even in childhood, he was a not unintelligent listener to the unspeakable talks of the Lake poets.

'It was so,' writes his brother, 'rather than by a regular course of study, that he was educated;—by desultory reading, by the living voice of Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth, Lloyd, Wilson, and De Quincey,—and again, by homely familiarity with town's folk and country folk, of every degree; lastly, by daily recurring hours of solitude,—by lonely wanderings with the murmur of the Brathay in his ear.' [1]

Thus he lived till the time came that he should go to Oxford, and naturally enough, it seems, he went up with much hope and strong excitement; for, quiet and calm as seem those ancient dormitories, to him, as to many, the going among them seemed the first entrance into the real world—the end of torpidity—the beginning of life. He had often stood by the white Rydal Water, and thought it was coming, and now it was come in fact. At first his Oxford life was prosperous enough. An old gentleman,[2] who believes that he too was once an undergraduate, well remembers how Hartley's eloquence was admired at wine parties and breakfast parties. 'Leaning his head on one shoulder, turning up his dark bright eyes, and swinging backwards and forwards in his chair, he would hold forth by the hour (for no one wished to interrupt him) on whatever subject might have been started—either of literature, politics, or religion

[1] *Memoir*, p. lvi. [2] Rev. Alexander Dyce.

—with an originality of thought, a force of illustration which,' the narrator doubts, 'if any man then living, except his father, could have surpassed.'[1]

The singular gift of continuous conversation—for singular it is, if in any degree agreeable—seems to have come to him by nature, and it was through life the one quality which he relied on for attraction in society. Its being agreeable is to be accounted for mainly by its singularity; if one knew any respectable number of declaimers—if any proportion of one's acquaintance should receive the gift of the English language, and 'improve each shining hour' with liquid eloquence, how we should regret their present dumb and torpid condition! If we are to be dull—which our readers will admit to be an appointment of providence—surely we will be dull in silence. Do not sermons exist, and are they not a warning to mankind?

In fact, the habit of common and continuous speech is a symptom of mental deficiency. It proceeds from not knowing what is going on in other people's minds. S. T. Coleridge, it is well known, talked to everybody, and to everybody alike; like a Christian divine, he did not regard persons. 'That is a fine opera, Mr. Coleridge,' said a young lady, some fifty years back. 'Yes, ma'am; and I remember Kant somewhere makes a very similar remark, for, as *we* know, the idea of philosophical infinity ——' Now, this sort of talk will answer with two sorts of people—with comfortable, stolid, solid people, who don't understand it at all—who don't feel that they ought to understand it—who feel that they ought not—that *they* are to sell treacle and appreciate figs —but that there *is* this transcendental superlunary sphere, which is known to others—which is now

[1] *Memoir*, p. lxiv.

revealed in the spiritual speaker, the unmitigated oracle, the evidently celestial sound. That the dreamy orator himself has no more notion what is passing in their minds than they have what is running through his, is of no consequence at all. If he did know it, he would be silent; he would be jarred to feel how utterly he was misunderstood; it would break the flow of his everlasting words. Much better that he should run on in a never-pausing stream, and that the wondering rustics should admire for ever. The basis of the entire entertainment is that neither should comprehend the other.—But in a degree yet higher is the society of an omniscient orator agreeable to young men, and particularly —as in Hartley's case—to clever undergraduates.

All young men like what is theatrical, and by a fine dispensation all clever young men like notions. They want to have opinions, to hear about opinions, to know about opinions. The ever-flowing rhetorician gratifies both propensions. He is a notional *spectacle.* Like the sophist of old, he *is* something and says something. The vagabond speculator in all ages will take hold on those who wish to reason, and want premises—who wish to argue, and want theses—who desire demonstrations, and have but presumptions. And so it was acceptable enough that Hartley should make the low tones of his musical voice glide sweetly and spontaneously through the cloisters of Merton, debating the old questions, the 'fate, free-will, foreknowledge,'—the points that Ockham and Scotus propounded in these same enclosures—the common riddles, the everlasting enigmas of mankind. It attracts the scorn of middle-aged men (who depart πρὸς τὰ ἱερα, and fancy they are wise), but it is a pleasant thing, that impact of hot thought upon hot thought, of young

thought upon young thought, of new thought upon new thought. It comes to the fortunate once, but to no one a second time thereafter for ever.

Nor was Hartley undistinguished in the regular studies of the University. A regular, exact, accurate scholar he never was; but even in his early youth he perhaps knew much more and understood much more of ancient literature than seven score of schoolmasters and classmen. He had, probably, in his mind a picture of the ancient world, or of some of it, while the dry *literati* only know the combinations and permutations of the Greek alphabet.

There is a pleasant picture of him at this epoch, recorded by an eye-witness.[1] 'My attention,' he narrates, 'was at first aroused by seeing from my window a figure flitting about amongst the trees and shrubs of the garden with quick and agitated motion. This was Hartley, who, in the ardour of preparing for his college examination, did not even take his meals with the family, but snatched a hasty morsel in his own apartment, and only . . . sought the free air when the fading daylight no longer permitted him to see his books. Having found out who he was that so mysteriously flitted about the garden, I was determined to lose no time in making his acquaintance; and through the instrumentality of Mrs. Coleridge I paid Hartley a visit to what he called his den. This was a room afterwards converted by Mr. Southey'—as what chink was not?—'into a supplementary library, but then appropriated as a study to Hartley, and presenting a most picturesque and student-like disorder of scattered pamphlets and open folios.'[2] This is not a picture of the business-like reading man—one wonders what fraction of his time he did read—but

[1] Chancey Hare Townsend. [2] *Memoir*, p. lxvii.

it was probably the happiest period of his life. There was no coarse prosaic action there. Much musing, little studying,—fair scholarship, an atmosphere of the classics, curious fancies, much perusing of pamphlets, light thoughts on heavy folios,—these make the meditative poet, but not the technical and patient-headed scholar; yet, after all, he was happy, and obtained a second class.

A more suitable exercise, as it would have seemed at first sight, was supplied by that curious portion of Oxford routine, the Annual Prize Poem. This, he himself tells us, was, in his academic years, the real and single object of his ambition. His reason is, for an autobiographical reason, decidedly simple. 'A great poet,' he says, 'I should not have imagined myself, for I knew well enough that the verses were no great things.' But he entertained at that period of life—he was twenty-one—a favourable opinion of young ladies; and he seems to have ascertained, possibly from actual trial, that verses were not in themselves a very emphatic attraction. Singular as it may sound, the ladies selected were not only insensible to what is, after all, a metaphysical line, the distinction between good poetry and bad, but were almost indifferent to poetry itself. Yet the experiment was not quite conclusive. Verses might fail in common life, and yet succeed in the Sheldonian theatre. It is plain that they would be *read out*; it occurred to him, as he naïvely relates, that if he should appear 'as a prizeman,' 'as an intelligible reciter of poetry,' he would be an object of 'some curiosity to the fair promenaders in Christchurch Meadow;' that the young ladies 'with whom he was on bowing and speaking terms might have felt a satisfaction in being known to know me, which they had never experienced before.' 'I should,' he adds,

' have deemed myself a prodigious lion, and it was a character I was weak enough to covet more than that of poet, scholar, or philosopher.' [1]

In fact, he did not get the prize. The worthy East Indian who imagined that, in leaving a bequest for a prize to poetry, he should be as sure of possessing poetry for his money as of eggs, if he had chosen eggs, or butter, if he had chosen butter, did not estimate rightly the nature of poetry, or the nature of the human mind. The mechanical parts of rhythm and metre are all that a writer can be certain of producing, or that a purchaser can be sure of obtaining; and these an industrious person will find in any collection of the Newdegate poems, together with a fine assortment of similes and sentiments, respectively invented and enjoined by Shem and Japhet for and to the use of after generations.

And there is a peculiar reason why a great poet (besides his being, as a man of genius, rather more likely than another, to find a difficulty in the preliminary technicalities of art) should not obtain an academical prize, to be given for excellent verses to people of about twenty-one. It is a bad season. ' The imagination,' said a great poet of the very age, ' of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy, but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted. . . .' [2] And particularly in a real poet, where the disturbing influences of passion and fancy are most likely to be in excess, will this unhealthy tinge be most likely to be excessive and conspicuous. Nothing in the style of *Endymion* would have a chance of a prize; there are no complete conceptions, no continuance of adequate words.

[1] *Memoir*, lxxxii. [2] Keats Preface to *Endymion*.

What is worse, there are no defined thoughts, or aged illustrations. The characteristic of the whole is beauty and novelty, but it is beauty which is not formed, and novelty which is strange and wavering.

Some of these defects are observable in the copy of verses on the ' Horses of Lysippus,' which Hartley Coleridge contributed to the list of unsuccessful attempts. It does not contain so much originality as we might have expected ; on such a topic we anticipated more nonsense ; a little, we are glad to say, there is, and also that there is an utter want of those even raps which are the music of prize poems,—which were the right rhythm for Pope's elaborate sense, but are quite unfit for dreamy classics or contemplative enthusiasm. If Hartley, like Pope, had been the son of a shopkeeper, he would not have received the paternal encouragement, but rather a reprimand,—' Boy, boy, these be bad rhymes ; ' and so, too, believed a grizzled and cold examiner.

A much worse failure was at hand. He had been elected to a Fellowship, in what was at that time the only open foundation in Oxford, Oriel College : an event which shows more exact scholarship in Hartley, or more toleration in the academical authorities for the grammatical delinquencies of a superior man, than we should have been inclined, *a priori*, to attribute to either of them. But it soon became clear that Hartley was not exactly suited to that place. Decorum is the essence, pomposity the advantage, of tutors. These Hartley had not. Beside the serious defects which we shall mention immediately, he was essentially an absent and musing, and therefore at times a highly indecorous man ; and though not defective in certain kinds of vanity, there was no tinge in his manner of

scholastic dignity. A schoolmaster should have an atmosphere of awe, and walk wonderingly, as if he was amazed at being himself. But an excessive sense of the ludicrous disabled Hartley altogether from the acquisition of this valuable habit; perhaps he never really attempted to obtain it. He accordingly never became popular as a tutor, or was described as 'exercising an influence over young persons.'

Moreover, however excellently suited Hartley's eloquence might be to the society of undergraduates, it was out of place at the Fellows' table. This is said to be a dull place. The excitement of early thought has passed away; the excitements of active manhood are unknown. A certain torpidity seems natural there. We find too that, probably for something to say, he was in those years rather fond of exaggerated denunciation of the powers that be. This is not the habit most grateful to the heads of houses. 'Sir,' said a great authority, 'do you deny that Lord Derby ought to be Prime Minister? you might as well say that I ought not to be Warden of So and So.' These habits rendered poor Hartley no favourite with the leading people of his college, and no great prospective shrewdness was required to predict that he would fare but ill, if any sufficient occasion should be found for removing from the place a person so excitable and so little likely to be of use in inculcating 'safe' opinions among the surrounding youth.

Unhappily, the visible morals of Hartley offered an easy occasion. It is not quite easy to gather from the narrative of his brother the exact nature or full extent of his moral delinquencies; but enough is shown to warrant, according to the rules, the unfavourable judgment of the collegiate authorities.

He describes, probably truly, the commencement of his errors—'I verily believe that I should have gone crazy, silly-mad, with vanity, had I obtained the prize for my "Horses of Lysippus." It was [almost] the only occasion in my life wherein I was keenly disappointed, for it was the only one upon which I felt any confident hope. I had made myself very sure of it; and the intelligence that not I, but Macdonald, was the lucky man, absolutely stupefied me. Yet I contrived, for a time, to lose all sense of my [own] misfortune, in exultation for Burton's success. . . . I sang, I danced, I whistled, I ran from room to room announcing the great tidings, and tried to persuade [even] myself that I cared nothing at all for my own case. But it would not do. It was bare sands with me the next day. It was not the mere loss of the prize, but the feeling or phantasy of an adverse destiny. . . . I foresaw that all my aims and hopes would prove frustrate and abortive; and from that time I date my downward declension, my impotence of will, and melancholy recklessness. It was the first time I sought relief from wine, which, as usual in such cases, produced not so much intoxication as downright madness.'[1]

Cast in an uncongenial society, requiring to live in an atmosphere of respect and affection—and surrounded by gravity and distrust—misconstrued and half tempted to maintain the misconstruction; with the waywardness of childhood without the innocency of its impulses; with the passions of manhood without the repressive vigour of a man's will,—he lived as a woman lives that is lost and forsaken, who sins ever and hates herself for sinning, but who sins, perhaps, more on that very account; because she requires some relief from the keenness of her own reproach;

[1] *Memoir*, p. lxxxiii.

because, in her morbid fancy, the idea is ever before her; because her petty will is unable to cope with the daily craving and the horrid thought—that she may not lose her own identity—that she may not give in to the rigid, the distrustful, and the calm.

There is just this excuse for Hartley, whatever it may be worth, that the weakness was hereditary. We do not as yet know, it seems most likely that we shall never know, the precise character of his father. But with all the discrepancy concerning the details, enough for our purpose is certain of the outline. We know that he lived many and long years a prey to weaknesses and vice of this very description; and though it be false and mischievous to speak of hereditary vice, it is most true and wise to observe the mysterious fact of hereditary temptation. Doubtless it is strange that the nobler emotions and the inferior impulses, their peculiar direction or their proportionate strength, the power of a fixed idea—that the inner energy of the very will, which seems to issue from the inmost core of our complex nature, and to typify, if anything does, the pure essence of the immortal soul—that these and such as these should be transmitted by material descent, as though they were an accident of the body, the turn of an eyebrow, or the feebleness of a joint,—if this were not obvious, it would be as amazing, perhaps more amazing, than any fact which we know; it looks not only like predestinated, but even heritable election.

But, explicable or inexplicable—to be wondered at or not wondered at—the fact is clear; tendencies and temptations are transmitted even to the fourth generation both for good and for evil, both in those who serve God and in those who serve Him not. Indeed, the weakness before us seems essentially

connected—perhaps we may say on a final examination essentially identical—with the dreaminess of mind, the inapprehensiveness of reality which we remarked upon before. Wordsworth used to say, that 'at a particular stage of his mental progress he used to be frequently so wrapt into an unreal transcendental world of ideas, that the external world seemed no longer to exist in relation to him, and he had to convince himself of its existence by *clasping a tree* or something that happened to be near him.'[1] But suppose a mind which did not feel acutely the sense of reality which others feel, in hard contact with the tangible universe; which was blind to the distinction between the palpable and the impalpable, or rather lived in the latter in preference to, and nearly to the exclusion of, the former. What is to fix such a mind, what is to strengthen it, to give it a fulcrum?

To exert itself, the will, like the arm, requires to have an obvious and a definite resistance, to know where it is, why it is, whence it comes, and whither it goes. 'We are such stuff as dreams are made of,' says the type of the dreamy character, Prospero. The difficulty of Hamlet is that he cannot quite believe that his duty is to be done where it lies, and immediately. Partly from the natural effect of a vision of a spirit which is not, but more from native constitution and instinctive bent, he is for ever speculating on the reality of existence, the truth of the world. 'How,' discusses Kant, 'is Nature in general possible?' and so asked Hamlet too. With this feeling on his mind, persuasion is useless and argument in vain. Examples gross as earth exhort

[1] 'Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality.'—Note to *Intimations of Immortality*.

him, but they produce no effect; he but thinks and thinks the more.

> 'Now, whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event,—
> A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward,—I do not know
> Why yet I live to say, "This thing's to do,"
> Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
> To do 't.' [1]

Hartley himself well observes that on such a character the likelihood of action is inversely as the force of the motive and the time for deliberation. The stronger the reason, the more certain the scepticism. *Can* anything be so certain? Does not the excess of the evidence alleged make it clear that there is something behind, something on the other side? Search then diligently lest anything be overlooked. Reflection 'puzzles the will.' Necessity 'benumbs like a torpedo': and so

> 'The native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard, their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action.' [2]

Why should we say any more? We do but 'chant snatches of old tunes.' But in estimating men like the Coleridges—the son even more than the father—we must take into account this peculiar difficulty—this dreamy unbelief—this daily scepticism—this haunting unreality—and imagine that some may not be quite responsible either for what they do, or for what they do not—because they are bewildered, and deluded, and perplexed, and want the faculty as much to comprehend their difficulty as to subdue it.

[1] *Hamlet*, IV. iv. 39. [2] *Ibid.* III. i. 84.

The Oxford life of Hartley is all his life. The failure of his prospects there, in his brother's words, 'deprived him of the residue of his years.' The biography afterwards goes to and fro—one attempt after another failing, some beginning in much hope, but even the sooner for that reason issuing in utter despair. His literary powers came early to full perfection. For some time after his expulsion from Oriel he was resident in London, and the poems written there are equal, perhaps are superior, to any which he afterwards produced. This sonnet may serve as a specimen :—

'In the great city we are met again,
Where many souls there are, that breathe and die,
Scarce knowing more of nature's potency,
Than what they learn from heat, or cold, or rain,
The sad vicissitude of weary pain :—
For busy man is lord of ear and eye,
And what hath nature, but the vast, void sky,
And the throng'd river toiling to the main ?
Oh ! say not so, for she shall have her part
In every smile, in every tear that falls,
And she shall hide her in the secret heart,
Where love persuades, and sterner duty calls ;
But worse it were than death, or sorrow's smart,
To live without a friend within these walls.'

He soon, however, went down to the Lakes, and there he, with a single exception, lived and died. This exception was a residence at Leeds, during which he brought out, besides a volume containing his best poems, the book which stands at the head of our article—*Lives of the Northern Worthies*.[1] We selected the book, we confess, with the view mainly of bringing a remarkable character before the notice of our readers—but in itself the work is an excellent one, and of a rare kind.

Books are for various purposes—tracts to teach,

[1] *Biographia Borealis, or Lives of Distinguished Northerns.*

almanacs to sell, poetry to make pastry, but this is the rarest sort of book, a book to *read*. As Dr. Johnson said, ' Sir, a good book is one you can hold in your hand, and take to the fire.' Now there are extremely few books which can, with any propriety, be so treated. When a great author, as Grote or Gibbon, has devoted a whole life of horrid industry to the composition of a large history, one feels one ought not to touch it with a mere hand—it is not respectful. The idea of slavery hovers over the *Decline and Fall*. Fancy a stiffly dressed gentleman, in a stiff chair, slowly writing that stiff compilation in a stiff hand : it is enough to stiffen you for life. Or is poetry readable ? Of course it is rememberable ; when you have it in the mind, it clings ; if by heart, it haunts. Imagery comes from it ; songs which lull the ear, heroines that waste the time.

But this Biographia is actually read ; a man is glad to take it up, and slow to lay it down ; it is a book which is truly valuable, for it is truly pleasing ; and which a man who has once had it in his library would miss from his shelves, not only in the common way, by a physical vacuum, but by a mental deprivation. This strange quality it owes to a peculiarity of style. Many people give many theories of literary composition, and Dr. Blair, whom we will read, is sometimes said to have exhausted the subject ; but, unless he has proved the contrary, we believe that the knack in style is to write like a human being. Some think they must be wise, some elaborate, some concise ; Tacitus wrote like a pair of stays ; some startle as Thomas Carlyle, or a comet, inscribing with his tail. But legibility is given to those who neglect these notions, and are willing to be themselves, to write their own thoughts in their own words, in the simplest words, in the words wherein

they were thought; and such, and so great, was in this book the magnanimity of Hartley.

As has been said, from his youth onwards, Hartley's outward life was a simple blank. Much writing, and much musing, some intercourse with Wordsworth, some talking to undergraduate readers or Lake ladies, great loneliness, and much intercourse with the farmers of Cumberland—these pleasures, simple enough, most of them, were his life. The extreme pleasure of the peasantry in his conversation is particularly remarked. 'Ay, but Mr. Coleridge talks fine,' observed one. 'I would go through fire and water for Mr. C.,' interjected another. His father, with real wisdom, had provided (in part, at least) for his necessary wants in the following manner :—

'This is a codicil to my last will and testament.

'S. T. COLERIDGE.

'Most desirous to secure, as far as in me lies, for my dear son Hartley, the tranquillity indispensable to any continued and successful exertion of his literary talents, and which, from the like characters of our minds in this respect, I know to be especially requisite for his happiness, and persuaded that he will recognise in this provision that anxious affection by which it is dictated, I affix this codicil to my last will and testament. . . . And I hereby request them (the said trustees) to hold the sum accruing to Hartley Coleridge from the equal division of my total bequest between him, his brother Derwent, and his sister Sara, Coleridge, after his mother's decease, to dispose of the interest or proceeds of the same portion to or for the use of my dear son Hartley Coleridge, at such time or times, in such manner, and under such conditions, as they, the trustees above named, know to be my wish, and shall deem conducive to the attainment of my object in adding this codicil, namely, the anxious wish to ensure for my son the continued means of a home, in which I comprise board, lodging, and raiment. Providing that nothing in this codicil shall be so interpreted as to interfere with my son Hartley Coleridge's freedom of choice respecting his place of residence, or with his power of disposing of his portion by will after his decease according as his own judgment and affections may decide.'

An excellent provision, which would not, however, by the English law, have disabled the 'said Hartley' from depriving himself of 'the continued means of a home' by alienating the principal of the bequest; since the jurisprudence of this country has no legal definition of 'prodigality,' and does not consider any person incompetent to manage his pecuniary affairs unless he be quite and certainly insane. Yet there undoubtedly are persons, and poor Hartley was one of them, who, though in general perfectly sane, and even with superior powers of thought or fancy, are as completely unable as the most helpless lunatic to manage any pecuniary transactions, and to whom it would be a great gain to have perpetual guardians and compulsory trustees. But such people are rare, and few principles are so English as the maxim *de minimis non curat lex.*

He lived in this way for thirty years, or nearly so, but there is nothing to tell of all that time. He died on the 6th of January 1849, and was buried in Grasmere churchyard—the quietest place in England, 'by the yews,' as Arnold says, 'that Wordsworth planted, the Rotha with its big silent pools passing by.' It was a shining January day when Hartley was borne to the grave. 'Keep the ground for us,' said Mr. Wordsworth to the sexton; 'we are old [people], and it cannot be [for] long.' [1]

We have described Hartley's life at length for a peculiar reason. It is necessary to comprehend his character, to appreciate his works; and there is no way of delineating character but by a selection of characteristic sayings and actions. All poets, as is commonly observed, are delineated in their poems, but in very different modes. Each minute event in the melancholy life of Shelley is frequently alluded

[1] *Memoir*, p. clxxxvi.

to in his writings. The tender and reverential character of Virgil is everywhere conspicuous in his pages. It is clear that Chaucer was shrewd. We seem to have talked with Shakespeare, though we have forgotten the facts of his life; but it is not by minute allusion, or a tacit influence, or a genial and delightful sympathy, that a writer like Hartley Coleridge leaves the impress of himself, but in a more direct manner, which it will take a few words to describe.

Poetry begins in Impersonality. Homer is a voice—a fine voice, a fine eye, and a brain that drew with light; and this is all we know. The natural subjects of the first art are the scenes and events in which the first men naturally take an interest. They don't care—who does ?—for a kind old man; but they want to hear of the exploits of their ancestors —of the heroes of their childhood—of them that their fathers saw—of the founders of their own land —of wars, and rumours of wars—of great victories boldly won—of heavy defeats firmly borne—of desperate disasters unsparingly retrieved. So in all countries—Siegfried, or Charlemagne, or Arthur —they are but attempts at an Achilles: the subject is the same—the κλέα ἀνδρῶν and the death that comes to all. But then the mist of battles passes away, and the sound of the daily conflict no longer hurtles in the air, and a generation arises skilled with the skill of peace, and refined with the refinement of civilisation, yet still remembering the old world, still appreciating the old life, still wondering at the old men, and ready to receive, at the hand of the poet, a new telling of the old tale—a new idealisation of the legendary tradition. This is the age of dramatic art, when men wonder at the big characters of old, as schoolboys at the words of

Æschylus, and try to find in their own breasts the roots of those monstrous, but artistically developed impersonations.

With civilisation too comes another change: men wish not only to tell what they have seen, but also to express what they are conscious of. Barbarians feel only hunger, and that is not lyrical; but as time runs on, arise gentler emotions and finer moods and more delicate desires which need expression, and require from the artist's fancy the lightest touches and the most soothing and insinuating words. Lyrical poetry, too, as we know, is of various kinds. Some, as the war song, approach to the epic, depict events and stimulate to triumph; others are love songs to pour out wisdom, others sober to describe champagne; some passive and still, and expressive of the higher melancholy, as Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard.' But with whatever differences of species and class, the essence of lyrical poetry remains in all identical; it is designed to express, and when successful does express, some one mood, some single sentiment, some isolated longing in human nature. It deals not with man as a whole, but with man piecemeal, with man in a scenic aspect, with man in a peculiar light. Hence lyrical poets must not be judged literally from their lyrics: they are discourses; they require to be reduced into the scale of ordinary life, to be stripped of the enraptured element, to be clogged with gravitating prose.

Again, moreover, and in course of time, the advance of ages and the progress of civilisation appear to produce a new species of poetry which is distinct from the lyrical, though it grows out of it, and contrasted with the epic, though in a single respect it exactly resembles it. This kind may be called the *self-delineative*, for in it the poet deals, not with a

particular desire, sentiment, or inclination in his own mind, not with a special phase of his own character, not with his love of war, his love of ladies, his melancholy, but with his mind viewed as a whole, with the entire essence of his own character. The first requisite of this poetry is truth. It is, in Plato's phrase, the soul 'itself by itself' aspiring to view and take account of the particular notes and marks that distinguish it from all other souls. The sense of reality is necessary to excellence; the poet being himself, speaks like one who has authority; he knows and must not deceive.

This species of poetry, of course, adjoins on the lyrical, out of which it historically arises. Such a poem as the 'Elegy' is, as it were, on the borders of the two; for while it expresses but a single emotion, meditative, melancholy, you seem to feel that this sentiment is not only then and for a moment the uppermost, but (as with Gray it was) the habitual mood, the pervading emotion of his whole life. Moreover, in one especial peculiarity, this sort of poetry is analogous to the narrative or epic. [No two things] certainly can, in a general aspect, be more distantly removed one from another, the one dealing in external objects and stirring events, the other with the stillness and repose of the poet's mind; but still in a single characteristic the two coincide. They describe character, as the painters say, *in mass*.

The defect of the drama is, that it can delineate only motion. If a thoughtful person will compare the character of Achilles, as we find it in Homer, with the more surpassing creations of dramatic invention, say with Lear or Othello, he will perhaps feel that character in repose, character on the lonely beach, character in marble, character in itself, is

more clearly and perfectly seen in the epic narrative than in the conversational drama. It of course requires immense skill to make mere talk exhibit a man as he is ἑτάρων ἄφαρ. Now this quality of epic poetry the self-delineative precisely shares with it. It describes a character—the poet's—alone by itself. And therefore, when the great master in both kinds did not hesitate to turn aside from his 'high argument' to say—

> 'More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
> To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,' [1]

pedants may prose as they please about the 'impropriety' of 'interspersing' species of composition which are by nature remote; but Milton felt more profoundly that in its treatment of character the egotistical poetry is allied to the epic; that he was putting together elements which would harmoniously combine; that he was but exerting the same faculties in either case—being guided thereto by a sure instinct, the desire of genius to handle and combine every one of the subjects on which it is genius.

Now it is in this self-delineative species of poetry that, in our judgment, Hartley Coleridge has attained to nearly, if not quite, the highest excellence; it pervades his writings everywhere. But a few sonnets may be quoted to exemplify it:—

> 'We parted on the mountains, as two streams
> From one clear spring pursue their several ways;
> And thy fleet course has been through many a maze
> In foreign lands, where silvery Padus gleams
> To that delicious sky, whose glowing beams
> Brighten'd the tresses that old poets praise;
> Where Petrarch's patient love, and artful lays,
> And Ariosto's song of many themes,

[1] *Paradise Lost*, vii. 24.

Moved the soft air. But I, a lazy brook,
As close pent up within my native dell,
Have crept along from nook to shady nook,
Where flow'rets blow and whispering Naiads dwell.
Yet now we meet that parted were so wide,
For[1] rough and smooth to travel side by side.'

'Once I was young, and fancy was my all,
My love, my joy, my grief, my hope, my fear,
And ever ready as an infant's leer[2]
Whate'er in Fancy's kingdom might befal,
Some quaint device had Fancy still at call,
With seemly verse to greet the coming cheer;
Such grief to soothe, such airy hope to rear,
To sing the birth-song, or the funeral,
Of such light love, it was a pleasant task;
But ill accord the quirks of wayward glee,
That wears affliction for a wanton mask,
With woes that bear not Fancy's livery;
With Hope that scorns of Fate its fate to ask,
But is itself its own sure destiny.'

'Too true it is, my time of power was spent
In idly watering weeds of casual growth,—
That wasted energy to desperate sloth
Declined, and fond self-seeking discontent;—
That the huge debt for all that nature lent
I sought to cancel,—and was nothing loth
To deem myself an outlaw, sever'd both
From duty and from hope,—yea, blindly sent
Without an errand, where I would to stray:—
Too true it is, that knowing now my state,
I weakly mourn the sin I ought to hate,
Nor love the law I yet would fain obey:
But true it is, above all law and fate
Is Faith, abiding the appointed day.'

'Long time a child, and still a child, when years
Had painted manhood on my cheek, was I;
For yet I lived like one not born to die;
A thriftless prodigal of smiles and tears,
No hope I needed, and I knew no fears.
But sleep, though sweet, is only sleep, and waking,
I waked to sleep no more, at once o'ertaking
The vanguard of my age, with all arrears

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[1] 'O'er.' [2] 'tear.'

Of duty on my back. Nor child, nor man,
Nor youth, nor sage, I find my head is grey,
For I have lost the race I never ran :
A rathe December blights my lagging May ;
And still I am a child, tho' I be old,
Time is my debtor for my years untold.'

Indeed, the whole series of sonnets with which the earliest and best work of Hartley began is (with a casual episode on others) mainly and essentially a series on himself. Perhaps there is something in the structure of the sonnet rather adapted to this species of composition. It is too short for narrative, too artificial for the intense passions, too complex for the simple, too elaborate for the domestic ; but in an impatient world where there is not a premium on self-describing, who so would speak of himself must be wise and brief, artful and composed—and in these respects he will be aided by the concise dignity of the tranquil sonnet.

It is remarkable that in this, too, Hartley Coleridge resembled his father. Turn over the early poems of S. T. Coleridge, the minor poems (we exclude ' The [Ancient] Mariner ' and ' Christabel,' which are his epics), but the small shreds which Bristol worshipped and Cottle paid for, and you will be disheartened by utter dullness. Taken on a decent average, and perhaps excluding a verse here and there, it really seems to us that they are inferior to the daily works of the undeserving and multiplied poets. If any reader will peruse any six of the several works intituled *Poems by a Young Gentleman*, we believe he will find the refined anonymity less insipid than the small productions of Samuel Taylor. There will be less puff and less ostentation. The reputation of the latter was caused not by their merit but by their time.

Fifty years ago people believed in metre, and it is

plain that Coleridge (Southey may be added, for that matter) believed in it also ; the people in Bristol said that these two were wonderful men, because they had written wonderfully small verses ;—and such is human vanity, that both for a time accepted the creed. In Coleridge, who had large speculative sense, the hallucination was not permanent—there are many traces that he rated his Juvenilia at their value ; but poor Southey, who lived with domestic women, actually died in the delusion that his early works were perfect, except that he tried to ' amend ' the energy out of ' Joan of Arc,' which was the only good thing in it. His wife did not doubt that he had produced stupendous works. Why, then, should he ? But experience has now shown that a certain metrical facility, and a pleasure in the metrical expression of certain sentiments, are in youth extremely common. Many years ago, Mr. Moore is reported to have remarked to Sir Walter Scott that hardly a magazine was then published which did not contain verses that would have made a sensation when they were young men. ' Confound it, Tom,' was the reply, ' what luck it was *we* were born before all these fellows.' And though neither Moore nor Scott are to be confounded with the nameless and industrious versifiers of the present day, yet it must be allowed that they owed to their time and their position—to the small quantity of rhyme in the market of the moment, and the extravagant appreciation of their early productions—much of that popular encouragement which induced them to labour upon more excellent compositions and to train themselves to write what they will be remembered by.

But, dismissing these considerations, and returning to the minor poems of S. T. Coleridge, although we

fearlessly assert that it is impossible for any sane man to set any value on—say the 'Religious Musings' —an absurd attempt to versify an abstract theory, or the essay on the Pixies, who had more fun in them than the reader of it could suspect—it still is indisputable that scattered here and there through these poems, there are lines about himself (lines, as he said in later life, 'in which the subjective object views itself subjectivo-objectively') which rank high in that form of art. Of this kind are the 'Tombless Epitaph,' for example, or the lines,—

> 'To me hath Heaven with bounteous hand assign'd
> Energic Reason and a shaping mind,
> The daring ken of Truth, the Patriot's part,
> And Pity's sigh, that breathes the gentle heart—
> Sloth-jaundiced all! and from my graspless hand.
> Drop Friendship's priceless[1] pearls, like hour-glass sand.
> I weep, yet stoop not! the faint anguish flows,
> A dreamy pang in Morning's fev'rish doze;'[2]

and so on. In fact, it would appear that the tendency to, and the faculty for, self-delineation are very closely connected with the dreaminess of disposition and impotence of character which we spoke of just now. Persons very subject to these can grasp no external object, comprehend no external being; they can do no external thing, and therefore they are left to themselves. Their own character is the only one which they can view as a whole, or depict as a reality; of every other they may have glimpses, and acute glimpses, like the vivid truthfulness of particular dreams; but no settled appreciation, no connected development, no regular sequence whereby they may be exhibited on paper or conceived in the imagination. If other qualities are supposed to be identical, those

[1] 'Precious.'
[2] 'Lines on a Friend who died of a Frenzy Fever.'

will be most egotistical who only know themselves; the people who talk most of themselves will be those who talk best.

In the execution of minor verses, we think we could show that Hartley should have the praise of surpassing his father; but nevertheless it would be absurd, on a general view, to compare the two men. Samuel Taylor was so much bigger; what there was in his son was equally good, perhaps, but then there was not much of it; outwardly and inwardly he was essentially little. In poetry, for example, the father has produced two longish poems, which have worked themselves right down to the extreme depths of the popular memory, and stay there very firmly, in part from their strangeness, but in part from their power. Of Hartley, nothing of this kind is to be found—he could not write connectedly; he wanted steadiness of purpose, or efficiency of will, to write so voluntarily; and his genius did not, involuntarily, and out of its unseen workings, present him with continuous creations; on the contrary, his mind teemed with little fancies, and a new one came before the first had attained any enormous magnitude. As his brother observed, he wanted 'back thought.' 'On what plan, Mr. Coleridge, are you arranging your books?' inquired a lady. 'Plan, madam? I have no plan: at first I had a principle; but then I had another, and now I do not know.' The same contrast between the 'shaping mind' of the father, and the gentle and minute genius of the son, is said to have been very plain in their conversation. That of Samuel Taylor was continuous, diffused, comprehensive.

'Strongly it bears us along in swelling and limitless motion,
Nothing before and nothing behind, but the sky and the ocean.'

'Great talker, certainly,' said Hazlitt, '*if* you will let him start from no *data*, and come to no conclusion.' The talk of Hartley, on the contrary, though continuous in time, was detached in meaning; stating hints and observations on particular subjects; glancing lightly from side to side, but throwing no intense light on any, and exhausting none. It flowed gently over small doubts and pleasant difficulties, rippling for a minute sometimes into bombast, but lightly recovering and falling quietly in 'melody back.'

By way, it is likely, of compensation to Hartley for this great deficiency in what his father imagined to be his own *forte*—the power of conceiving a whole—Hartley possessed, in a considerable degree, a species of sensibility to which the former was nearly a stranger. 'The mind of S. T. Coleridge,' says one who had every means of knowing and observing, 'was not in the least under the influence of external objects.' Except in the writings written during daily and confidential intimacy with Wordsworth (an exception that may be obviously accounted for), no trace can perhaps be found of any new image or metaphor from natural scenery. There is some story too of his going for the first time to York, and by the Minster, and never looking up at it. But Hartley's poems evince a great sensibility to a certain aspect of exterior nature, and great fanciful power of presenting that aspect in the most charming and attractive forms.

It is likely that the London boyhood of the elder Coleridge was—added to a strong abstractedness which was born with him—a powerful cause in bringing about the curious mental fact, that a great poet, so susceptible to every other species of refining and delightful feeling, should have been utterly

destitute of any perception of beauty in landscape or nature. We must not forget that S. T. C[oleridge] was a bluecoat boy,—what do any of them know about fields ? And similarly, we require in Hartley's case, before we can quite estimate his appreciation of nature, to consider his position, his circumstances, and especially his time.

Now it came to pass in those days that William Wordsworth went up into the hills. It has been attempted in recent years to establish that the object of his life was to teach Anglicanism. A whole life of him has been written by an official gentleman, with the apparent view of establishing that the great poet was a believer in rood-lofts, an idolater of piscinæ. But this is not capable of rational demonstration. Wordsworth, like Coleridge, began life as a heretic, and as the shrewd Pope unfallaciously said, 'Once a heretic, always a heretic.' Sound men are sound from the first ; safe men are safe from the beginning, and Wordsworth began wrong. His real reason for going to live in the mountains was certainly in part sacred, but it was not in the least Tractarian :—

> 'He, with many feelings, many thoughts,
> Made up a meditative joy, and found
> Religious meanings in the forms of nature ! ' [1]

His whole soul was absorbed in the one idea, the one feeling, the one thought, of the sacredness of hills.

> 'Early had he learned
> To reverence the volume that displays
> The mystery, the life which cannot die ;
> But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.
> All things, responsive to the writing, there
> Breathed immortality, revolving life,
> And greatness still revolving ; infinite :
> There littleness was not.'
> . . . . . .

[1] Coleridge : 'Fears in Solitude.'

'[—In the after-day
Of boyhood, many an hour in caves forlorn,
And 'mid the hollow depths of naked crags]
He sate, and e'en in their fixed lineaments,
Or from the power of a peculiar eye,
Or by creative feeling overborne,
Or by predominance of thought oppressed,
E'en in their fixed [and steady] lineaments
He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind,
Expression ever varying!' [1]

'A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.' [2]

The defect of this religion is that it is too abstract for the practical, and too bare for the musing. What active men require is personality, the meditative require beauty. But Wordsworth gives us neither. The worship of sensuous beauty—the southern religion—is of all sentiments the one most deficient in his writings. His poetry hardly even gives the charm, the entire charm, of the scenery in which he lived. The lighter parts are little noticed: the rugged parts protrude. The bare waste, the folding hill, the rough lake, Helvellyn with a brooding mist, Ulswater in a grey day: these are his subjects. He took a personal interest in the corners of the universe. There is a print of Rembrandt said to represent a piece of the Campagna, a mere waste, with a stump and a man, and under is written 'Tacet et loquitur'; and thousands will pass the old printshop where it hangs, and yet have a taste for paintings, and colours, and oils: but some fanciful students, some lonely

[1] Wordsworth's 'Excursion,' book 1.
[2] 'Tintern Abbey.'

stragglers, some long-haired enthusiasts, by chance will come, one by one, and look, and look, and be hardly able to take their eyes from the fascination, so massive is the shade, so still the conception, so firm the execution.

Thus is it with Wordsworth and his poetry. *Tacet loquiturque.* Fashion apart, the million won't read it. Why should they ?—they could not understand it,—don't put them out,—let them buy, and sell, and die ; —but idle students, and enthusiastic wanderers, and solitary thinkers, will read, and read, and read, while their lives and their occupations hold. In truth, his works are the Scriptures of the intellectual life ; for that same searching, and finding, and penetrating power which the real Scripture exercises on those engaged, as are the mass of men, in practical occupations and domestic ties, do his works exercise on the meditative, the solitary, and the young.

> ' His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills.' [1]

And he had more than others—

> ' That blessed mood,
> [In which the burthen of the mystery,]
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened :—that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,—
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul !
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.' [2]

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[1] ' Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle.'
[2] ' Tintern Abbey.'

And therefore he has had a whole host of sacred imitators. Mr. Keble, for example, has translated him for women. He has himself told us that he owed to Wordsworth the tendency *ad sanctiora* which is the mark of his own writings; and in fact he has but adapted the tone and habit of reverence which his master applied to common objects and the course of the seasons, to sacred objects and the course of the ecclesiastical year,—diffusing a mist of sentiment and devotion altogether delicious to a gentle and timid devotee. Hartley Coleridge is another translator. He has applied to the sensuous beauties and seductive parts of external nature the same *cultus* which Wordsworth applied to the bare and the abstract. It is—

> 'Of that fair beauty which no eye can see,
> Of that sweet music which no ear can measure.' [1]

It is, as it were, female beauty in wood and water; it is Rydal Water on a shining day; it is the gloss of the world with the knowledge that it is gloss: the sense of beauty, as in some women, with the feeling that yet it is hardly theirs :—

> 'The vale of Tempe had in vain been fair,
> Green Ida never deem'd the nurse of Jove,
> Each fabled stream, beneath its covert grove,
> Had idly murmur'd to the idle air;
> The shaggy wolf had kept his horrid lair
> In Delphi's cell, and old Trophonius' cave,
> And the wild wailing of the Ionian wave
> Had never blended with the sweet despair
> Of Sappho's death-song: if the sight inspired
> Saw only what the visual organs show;
> If heaven-born phantasy no more required
> Than what within the sphere of sense may grow;
> The beauty to perceive of earthly things,
> The mounting soul must heavenward prune her wings.'

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[1] Hartley Coleridge: 'Sonnet.' [2] *Ibid.*

And he knew it himself : he has sketched the essence of his works :—

> ' Whither is gone the wisdom and the power,
> That ancient sages scatter'd with the notes
> Of thought-suggesting lyres ? The music floats
> In the void air ; e'en at this breathing hour,
> In every cell and every blooming bower
> The sweetness of old lays is hovering still :
> But the strong soul, the self-constraining will,
> The rugged root that bare the winsome flower
> Is weak and withered. Were we like the Fays
> That sweetly nestle in the fox-glove bells,
> Or lurk and murmur in the rose-lipp'd shells
> Which Neptune to the earth for quit-rent pays,
> Then might our pretty modern Philomels
> Sustain our spirits with their roundelays.' [1]

We had more to say of Hartley : we were to show that his ' Prometheus ' was defective ; that its style had no Greek severity, no defined outline ; that he was a critic as well as a poet, though in a small detached way, and what is odd enough, that he could criticise in rhyme. We were to make plain how his heart was in the right place, how his love-affairs were hopeless, how he was misled by his friends ; but our time is done, and our space is full, and these topics must ' go without day ' of returning. We may end as we began. There are some that are bold and strong and incessant and energetic and hard, and to these is this world's glory ; and some are timid and meek and impotent and cowardly and rejected and obscure. ' One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike.' And so of Hartley, whom few regarded ; he had a resource, the stillness of thought, the gentleness of musing, the peace of nature.

> ' To his side the fallow deer
> Came, and rested without fear ;

[1] Hartley Coleridge : ' Sonnet.'

The eagle, lord of land and sea,
Stooped down to pay him fealty;
And both the undying fish that swim
In [1] Bowscale-tarn did wait on him;
The pair were servants of his eye,
In their immortality;
And glancing, gleaming, dark or bright,
Moved to and fro, for his delight.
He knew the rocks which Angels haunt
Upon the mountains visitant;
He hath kenned them taking wing;
And into caves where Faeries sing
He hath entered; and been told
By Voices how men lived of old.
Among the heavens his eye can see
The face of thing that is to be;
And, if that men report him right,
His tongue could whisper words of might.
—Now another day is come,
Fitter hope, and nobler doom;
He hath thrown aside his crook,
And hath buried deep his book.' [2]

'And now the streams may sing for other's pleasure.
The hills sleep on in their eternity.' [3]

He is gone from among them.

[1] 'Through.'
[2] 'Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle.'
[3] Hartley Coleridge: 'Sonnet.'

WILLIAM COWPER.[1]

For the English, after all, the best literature is the English. We understand the language ; the manners are familiar to us ; the scene at home ; the associations our own. Of course, a man who has not read Homer is like a man who has not seen the ocean. There is a great object of which he has no idea. But we cannot be always seeing the ocean. Its face is always large ; its smile is bright ; the eversounding shore sounds on. Yet we have no property in them. We stop and gaze ; we pause and draw our breath ; we look and wonder at the grandeur of the other world ; but we live on shore. We fancy associations of unknown things and distant climes, of strange men and strange manners. But we are ourselves. Foreigners do not behave as we should, nor do the Greeks. What a strength of imagination, what a long practice, what a facility in the details of fancy is required to picture their past and unknown world ! They are deceased. They are said to be immortal, because they have written a good epitaph ; but they are gone. Their life and their manners have passed away. We read with interest in the catalogue of the ships—

[1] *Poetical Works of William Cowper.* Edited by Robert Bell. J. W. Parker & Son.

The Life of William Cowper, with Selections from his Correspondence. Being volume i. of the Library of Christian Biography, superintended by the Rev. Robert Bickersteth. Seeley, Jackson, & Co.

[This Essay was first published in *National Review* for July 1855.]

'The men of Argos and Tyrintha next.
And of Hermione, that stands retired
With Asine, within her spacious bay;
Of Epidaurus, crowned with purple vines,
And of Træzena, with the Achaian youth
Of sea-begirt Ægina, and with thine
Maseta, and the dwellers on thy coast,
Waveworn Eïonæ; . . .
And from Caristus and from Styra came
Their warlike multitudes, in front of whom
Elphenor marched, Calchodon's mighty son.
With foreheads shorn and wavy locks behind,
They followed, and alike were eager all
To split the hauberk with the shortened spear.'

But they are dead. '"So am not I," said the foolish fat scullion.'[1] We are the English of the present day. We have cows and calves, corn and cotton; we hate the Russians; we know where the Crimea is; we believe in Manchester the great. A large expanse is around us; a fertile land of corn and orchards, and pleasant hedgerows, and rising trees, and noble prospects, and large black woods, and old church towers. The din of great cities comes mellowed from afar. The green fields, the half-hidden hamlets, the gentle leaves, soothe us with 'a sweet inland murmur.' We have before us a vast seat of interest, and toil, and beauty, and power, and this our own. Here is our home.

The use of foreign literature is like the use of foreign travel. It imprints in early and susceptible years a deep impression of great, and strange, and noble objects; but we cannot live with these. They do not resemble our familiar life; they do not bind themselves to our intimate affection; they are picturesque and striking, like strangers and wayfarers, but they are not of our home, or homely; they cannot speak to our 'business and bosoms'; they cannot touch the hearth of the soul. It would be

[1] *Tristram Shandy*, vol. v. chap. vii.

better to have no outlandish literature in the mind than to have it the principal thing. We should be like accomplished vagabonds without a country, like men with a hundred acquaintances and no friends. We need an intellectual possession analogous to our own life; which reflects, embodies, improves it; on which we can repose; which will recur to us in the placid moments—which will be a latent principle even in the acute crises of our life. Let us be thankful if our researches in foreign literature enable us, as rightly used they will enable us, better to comprehend our own. Let us venerate what is old, and marvel at what is far. Let us read our own books. Let us understand ourselves.

With these principles, if such they may be called, in our minds, we gladly devote these early pages of our journal [1] to the new edition of Cowper with which Mr. Bell has favoured us. There is no writer more exclusively English. There is no one—or hardly one, perhaps—whose excellencies are more natural to our soil, and seem so little able to bear transplantation. We do not remember to have seen his name in any continental book. Professed histories of English literature, we dare say, name him; but we cannot recall any such familiar and cursory mention as would evince a real knowledge and hearty appreciation of his writings.

The edition itself is a good one. The life of Cowper, which is prefixed to it, though not striking, is sensible. The notes are clear, explanatory, and, so far as we know, accurate. The special introductions to each of the poems are short and judicious, and bring to the mind at the proper moment the passages in Cowper's letters most clearly relating to the work in

[1] This was the second article in the first number of the *National Review*.

hand. The typography is not very elegant, but it is plain and business-like. There is no affectation of cheap ornament.

The little book which stands second on our list belongs to a class of narratives written for a peculiar public, inculcating peculiar doctrines, and adapted, at least in part, to a peculiar taste. We dissent from many of these tenets, and believe that they derive no support, but rather the contrary, from the life of Cowper. In previous publications, written for the same persons, these opinions have been applied to that melancholy story in a manner which it requires strong writing to describe. In this little volume they are more rarely expressed, and when they are it is with diffidence, tact, and judgment.

Only a most pedantic critic would attempt to separate the criticism on Cowper's works from a narrative of his life. Indeed, such an attempt would be scarcely intelligible. Cowper's poems are almost as much connected with his personal circumstances as his letters, and his letters are as purely autobiographical as those of any man can be. If all information concerning him had perished save what his poems contain, the attention of critics would be diverted from the examination of their interior characteristics to a conjectural dissertation on the personal fortunes of the author. The Germans would have much to say. It would be debated in Tübingen who were the three hares, why 'The Sofa' was written, why John Gilpin was not called William. Halle would show with great clearness that there was no reason why he *should* be called William; that it appeared by the bills of mortality that several other persons born about the same period had also been called John; and

the ablest of all the professors would finish the subject with a monograph showing that there was a special fitness in the name John, and that any one with the æsthetic sense who (like the professor) had devoted many years exclusively to the perusal of the poem, would be certain that any other name would be quite 'paralogistic, and in every manner impossible and inappropriate.' It would take a German to write upon the hares.

William Cowper, the poet, was born on 26th November 1731, at his father's parsonage, at Berkhampstead. Of his father, who was chaplain to the king, we know nothing of importance. Of his mother, who had been named 'Donne,' and was a Norfolk lady, he has often made mention, and it appears that he regarded the faint recollection which he retained of her—for she died early—with peculiar tenderness. In later life, and when his sun was going down in gloom and sorrow, he recurred eagerly to opportunities of intimacy with her most distant relatives, and wished to keep alive the idea of her in his mind. That idea was not of course very definite; indeed, as described in his poems, it is rather the abstract idea of what a mother should be than anything else; but he was able to recognise her picture, and there is a suggestion of cakes and sugar-plums, which gives a life and vividness to the rest.

Soon after her death he was sent to a school kept by a man named Pitman, at which he always described himself as having suffered exceedingly from the cruelty of one of the boys. He could never see him, or think of him, he has told us, without trembling. And there must have been some solid reason for this terror, since—even in those days, when τυπτω meant 'I strike,' and 'boy' denoted a

thing to be beaten—this juvenile inflicter of secret stripes was actually expelled. From Mr. Pitman, Cowper, on account of a weakness in the eyes, which remained with him through life, was transferred to the care of an oculist,—a dreadful fate even for the most cheerful boy, and certainly not likely to cure one with any disposition to melancholy; hardly indeed can the boldest mind, in its toughest hour of manly fortitude, endure to be domesticated with an operation chair. Thence he went to Westminster, of which he has left us discrepant notices, according to the feeling for the time being uppermost in his mind. From several parts of the 'Tirocinium' it would certainly seem that he regarded the whole system of public school teaching not only with speculative disapproval, but with the painful hatred of a painful experience. A thousand genial passages in his private letters, however, really prove the contrary; and in a changing mood of mind, the very poem which was expressly written to 'recommend private tuition at home' gives some idea of school happiness.

'Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,
We love the play-place of our early days;
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.
The wall on which we tried our graving skill,
The very name we carved subsisting still,
The bench on which we sat while deep employed,
Though mangled, hacked, and hewed, not yet destroyed,
The little ones unbuttoned, glowing hot,
Playing our games, and on the very spot,
As happy as we once, to kneel and draw
The chalky ring, and knuckle down at taw;
To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,
Or drive it devious with a dextrous pat;
The pleasing spectacle at once excites
Such recollections of our own delights,
That, viewing it, we seem almost t' obtain
Our innocent sweet simple years again.

> This fond attachment to the well-known place,
> Whence first we started into life's long race,
> Maintains its hold with such unfailing sway,
> We feel it ev'n in age, and at our latest day.' [1]

Probably we pursue an insoluble problem in seeking a suitable education for a morbidly melancholy mind. At first it seems a dreadful thing to place a gentle and sensitive nature in contact, in familiarity, and even under the rule of coarse and strong buoyant natures. Nor should this be in general attempted. The certain result is present suffering, and the expected good is remote and disputable. Nevertheless, it is no artificial difficulty which we here encounter—none which we can hope by educational contrivances to meet or vanquish. The difficulty is in truth the existence of the world.

It is the fact that, by the constitution of society, the bold, the vigorous, and the buoyant rise and rule; and that the weak, the shrinking, and the timid fall and serve. In after-life, in the actual commerce of men, even too in those quiet and tranquil pursuits in which a still and gentle mind should seem to be under the least disadvantage, in philosophy and speculation, the strong and active, who have confidence in themselves and their ideas, acquire and keep dominion. It is idle to expect that this will not give great pain—that the shrinking and timid, who are often just as ambitious as others, will not repine—that the rough and strong will not often consciously inflict grievous oppression—will not still more often, without knowing it, cause to more tremulous minds a refined suffering which their coarser texture could never experience, which it does not sympathise with, nor comprehend. Some-

[1] *Tirocinium; or, A Review of Schools*, ll. 301–322.

time in life—it is but a question of a very few years at most—this trial must be undergone. There may be a short time, more or less, of gentle protection and affectionate care, but the leveret grows old—the world waits at the gate—the hounds are ready, and the huntsman too, and there is need of strength, and pluck, and speed.

Cowper indeed, himself, as we have remarked, does not, on an attentive examination, seem to have suffered exceedingly. In subsequent years, when a dark cloud had passed over him, he was apt at times to exaggerate isolated days of melancholy and pain, and fancy that the dislike which he entertained for the system of schools, by way of speculative principle, was in fact the result of a personal and suffering experience. But, as we shall have (though we shall not, in fact, perhaps use them all) a thousand occasions to observe, he had, side by side with a morbid and melancholy humour, an easy nature, which was easily satisfied with the world as he found it, was pleased with the gaiety of others, and liked the sight of, and sympathy with, the more active enjoyments which he did not care to engage in or to share.

Besides, there is every evidence that cricket and marbles (though he sometimes in his narratives suppresses the fact, in condescension to those of his associates who believed them to be the idols of wood and stone which are spoken of in the prophets) really exercised a laudable and healthy supremacy over his mind. The animation of the scene—the gay alertness which Gray looked back on so fondly in long years of soothing and delicate musing, exerted, as the passage which we cited shows, a great influence over a genius superior to Gray's in facility and freedom, though inferior in the 'little

footsteps'[1] of the finest fancy,—in the rare and carefully hoarded felicities, unequalled save in the immeasurable abundance of the greatest writers. Of course Cowper was unhappy at school, as he was unhappy always; and of course, too, we are speaking of Westminster only. For Dr. Pitman and the oculist there is nothing to say.

In scholarship Cowper seems to have succeeded. He was not, indeed, at all the sort of man to attain to that bold, strong-brained, confident scholarship which Bentley carried to such an extreme, and which, in almost every generation since, some Englishman has been found of hard head and stiff-clayed memory to keep up and perpetuate. His friend Thurlow was the man for this pursuit, and the man to prolong the just notion that those who attain early proficiency in it are likely men to become Lord Chancellors. Cowper's scholarship was simply the general and delicate *impression* which the early study of the classics insensibly leaves on a nice and susceptible mind. In point of information it was strictly of a common nature.

It is clear that his real knowledge was mostly confined to the poets, especially the ordinary Latin poets and Homer, and that he never bestowed any regular attention on the historians, or orators, or philosophers of antiquity, either at school or in after years. Nor indeed would such a course of study have in reality been very beneficial to him. The strong, analytic, comprehensive, reason-giving powers which are required in these dry and rational pursuits were utterly foreign to his mind. All that was

[1] 'There scattered oft, the earliest of the year,
By hands unseen, are showers of violets found;
The redbreast loves to build and warble there,
And little footsteps lightly print the ground.'—
Verse in Gray's 'Elegy,' cancelled by him. [F.M.].

congenial to him, he acquired in the easy intervals of apparent idleness. The friends whom he made at Westminster, and who continued for many years to be attached to him, preserved the probable tradition that he was a gentle and gradual, rather than a forcible or rigorous learner.

The last hundred years have doubtless seen a vast change in the common education of the common boy. The small and pomivorous animal which we so call is now subjected to a treatment very elaborate and careful,—that contrasts much with the simple alternation of classics and cuffs which was formerly so fashionable. But it may be doubted whether for a peculiar mind such as Cowper's, on the intellectual side at least, the tolerant and corpuscular theory of the last century was not preferable to the intolerant and never-resting moral influence that has succeeded to it. Some minds learn most when they seem to learn least. A certain placid, unconscious, equable in-taking of knowledge suits them, and alone suits them. To succeed in forcing such men to attain great learning is simply impossible. You cannot put the fawn into the 'Land Transport.' The only resource is to allow them to acquire gently and casually in their own way; and in that way they will often imbibe, as if by the mere force of existence, much pleasant and well-fancied knowledge.

From Westminster Cowper went at once into a solicitor's office. Of the next few years (he was then about eighteen) we do not know much. His attention to legal pursuits was, according to his own account, not very profound; yet it could not have been wholly contemptible, for his evangelical friend, Mr. Newton, who, whatever may be the worth of his religious theories, had certainly a sound, rough judgment on topics terrestrial, used in after years

to have no mean opinion of the value of his legal counsel. In truth, though nothing could be more out of Cowper's way than abstract and recondite jurisprudence, an easy and sensible mind like his would find a great deal which was very congenial to it in the well-known and perfectly settled maxims which regulate and rule the daily life of common men. No strain of capacity or stress of speculative intellect is necessary for the apprehension of these. A fair and easy mind, which is placed within their reach, will find it has learnt them, without knowing when or how.

After some years of legal instruction, Cowper chose to be called to the bar, and took chambers in the Temple accordingly. He never, however, even pretended to practise. He passed his time in literary society, in light study, in tranquil negligence. He was intimate with Colman, Lloyd, and other wits of those times. He wrote an essay in the *Connoisseur*, the kind of composition then most fashionable, especially with such literary gentlemen as were most careful not to be confounded with the professed authors. In a word, he did 'nothing,' as that word is understood among the vigorous, aspiring, and trenchant part of mankind. Nobody could seem less likely to attain eminence. Every one must have agreed that there was no harm in him, and few could have named any particular good which it was likely that he would achieve. In after days he drew up a memoir of his life, in which he speaks of those years with deep self-reproach. It was not, indeed, the secular indolence of the time which excited his disapproval. The course of life had not made him more desirous of worldly honours, but less; and nothing could be farther from his tone of feeling than regret for not having strenuously striven to attain them.

He spoke of those years in the Puritan manner,

using words which literally express the grossest kind of active Atheism in a vague and vacant way; leaving us to gather from external sources whether they are to be understood in their plain and literal signification, or in that out-of-the-way and technical sense in which they hardly have a meaning. In this case the external evidence is so clear that there is no difficulty. The regrets of Cowper had reference to offences which the healthy and sober consciences of mankind will not consider to deserve them. A vague, literary, omnitolerant idleness was perhaps their worst feature. He was himself obliged to own that he had always been considered 'as one religiously inclined, if not actually religious,' and the applicable testimony, as well as the whole form and nature of his character, forbid us to ascribe to him the slightest act of licence or grossness. A reverend biographer has called his life at this time 'an unhappy compound of guilt and wretchedness.' But unless the estimable gentleman thinks it sinful to be a barrister and wretched to live in the Temple, it is not easy to make out what he would mean.

In point of intellectual cultivation, and with a view to preparing himself for writing his subsequent works, it is not possible he should have spent his time better. He then acquired that easy, familiar knowledge of terrestrial things—the vague and general information of the superficies of all existence—the acquaintance with life, business, hubbub, and rustling matter-of-fact, which seem odd in the recluse of Olney—and enliven so effectually the cucumbers of the 'Task.' It has been said that at times every man wishes to be a man of the world, and even the most rigid critic must concede it to be nearly essential to a writer on real life and actual manners. If a man has not seen his brother, how can he describe him?

As this world calls happiness and blamelessness, it is not easy to fancy a life more happy—at least with more of the common elements of happiness, or more blameless than those years of Cowper. An easy temper, light fancies,—hardly as yet broken by shades of melancholy brooding;—an enjoying habit, rich humour, literary, but not pedantic companions, a large scene of life and observation, polished acquaintance and attached friends: these were his, and what has a light life more? A rough hero Cowper was not and never became, but he was then, as ever, a quiet and tranquil gentleman. If De Béranger's doctrine were true, '*Le bonheur tient au savoir-vivre*,' there were the materials of existence here. What, indeed, would not De Béranger have made of them?

One not unnatural result or accompaniment of such a life was that Cowper fell in love. There were in those days two young ladies, cousins of Cowper, residents in London, to one of whom, the Lady Hesketh of after years, he once wrote:—'My dear Cousin,—I wonder how it happened, that much as I love you, I was never in love with you.' No similar providence protected his intimacy with her sister. Theodora Cowper, 'one of the cousins with whom Thurlow used to giggle and make giggle in Southampton Row,'[1] was a handsome and vigorous damsel. 'What!' said her father, 'what will you do if you marry William Cowper?' meaning, in the true parental spirit, to intrude mere pecuniary ideas. 'Do, sir!' she replied. 'Wash all day, and ride out on the great dog all night!' a spirited combination of domestic industry and exterior excitement. It is doubtful, however, whether either of these species of pastime and occupation would have been exactly

[1] Southey, quoting a letter of Cowper to Lady Hesketh. [F.M.]

congenial to Cowper. A gentle and refined indolence must have made him an inferior washerman, and perhaps to accompany the canine excursions of a wife 'which clear-starched,' would have hardly seemed enough to satisfy his accomplished and placid ambition. At any rate, it certainly does seem that he was not a very vigorous lover. The young lady was, as he himself oddly said,—

> 'Through tedious years of doubt and pain,
> Fixed in her choice and faithful . . . *but in vain.*'

The poet does indeed partly allude to the parental scruples of Mr. Cowper, her father; but house-rent would not be so high as it is if fathers had their way. The profits of builders are eminently dependent on the uncontrollable nature of the best affections; and that intelligent class of men have had a table compiled from trustworthy data, in which the chances of parental victory are rated at .0000000001, and those of the young people themselves at .999999999,—in fact, as many nines as you can imagine. 'It has been represented to me,' says the actuary, 'that few young people ever marry without some objection, more or less slight, on the part of their parents; and from a most laborious calculation, from data collected in quarters both within and exterior to the bills of mortality, I am led to believe that the above figures represent the state of the case accurately enough to form a safe guide for the pecuniary investments of the gentlemen,' etc., etc.

It is not likely that Theodora Cowper understood decimals, but she had a strong opinion in favour of her cousin, and a great idea, if we rightly read the now obscure annals of old times, that her father's objections might pretty easily have been got over. In fact, we think so even now, without any prejudice

of affection, in our cool and mature judgment. Mr. Cowper the aged had nothing to say, except that the parties were cousins—a valuable remark, which has been frequently repeated in similar cases, but which has not been found to prevent a mass of matches both then and since. Probably the old gentleman thought the young gentleman by no means a working man, and objected, believing that a small income can only be made more by unremitting industry,—and the young gentleman, admitting this horrid and abstract fact, and agreeing, though perhaps tacitly in his uncle's estimate of his personal predilections, did not object to being objected to.

The nature of Cowper was not, indeed, passionate. He required beyond almost any man the daily society of amiable and cultivated women. It is clear that he preferred such gentle excitement to the rough and argumentative pleasures of more masculine companionship. His easy and humorous nature loved and learned from female detail. But he had no overwhelming partiality for a particular individual. One refined lady, the first moments of shyness over, was nearly as pleasing as another refined lady. Disappointment sits easy on such a mind. Perhaps, too, he feared the anxious duties, the rather contentious tenderness of matrimonial existence. At any rate, he acquiesced. Theodora never married. Love did not, however, kill her—at least, if it did, it was a long time at the task, as she survived these events more than sixty years. She never, seemingly, forgot the past.

But a dark cloud was at hand. If there be any truly painful fact about the world now tolerably well established by ample experience and ample records, it is that an intellectual and indolent happiness is wholly denied to the children of men. That

most valuable author, Lucretius, who has supplied us and others with an inexhaustible supply of metaphors on this topic, ever dwells on the life of his gods with a sad and melancholy feeling that no such life was possible on a crude and cumbersome earth. In general, the two opposing agencies are marriage and money; either of these breaks the lot of literary and refined inaction at once and for ever. The first of these, as we have seen, Cowper had escaped. His reserved and negligent reveries were still free, at least from the invasion of affection. To this invasion, indeed, there is commonly requisite the acquiesce or connivance of mortality; but all men are born, not free and equal, as the Americans maintain, but, in the Old World at least, basely subjected to the yoke of coin. It is in vain that in this hemisphere we endeavour after impecuniary fancies. In bold and eager youth we go out on our travels.

We visit Baalbec, and Paphos, and Tadmor, and Cythera,—ancient shrines and ancient empires, seats of eager love or gentle inspiration. We wander far and long. We have nothing to do with our fellow-men. What are we, indeed, to diggers and counters? We wander far; we dream to wander for ever, but we dream in vain. A surer force than the subtlest fascination of fancy is in operation. The purse-strings tie us to our kind. Our travel-coin runs low, and we must return, away from Tadmor and Baalbec back to our steady, tedious industry and dull work, to '*la vieille Europe* (as Napoleon said) *qui m'ennuie*.' It is the same in thought. In vain we seclude ourselves in elegant chambers, in fascinating fancies, in refined reflections. 'By this time,' says Cowper, 'my patrimony being nearly all spent, and there being no appearance that I should ever repair the damage by a fortune of my

own getting, I began to be a little apprehensive of approaching want.' However little one is fit for it, it is necessary to attack some drudgery. The vigorous and sturdy rouse themselves to the work. They find in its regular occupation, clear decisions, and stern perplexities, a bold and rude compensation for the necessary loss or diminution of light fancies and delicate musings,—

> 'The sights which[1] youthful poets dream,
> On summer eve by haunted stream.'[2]

But it was not so with Cowper. A peculiar and slight nature unfitted him for so rough and harsh a resolution. The lion may eat straw like the ox, and the child put his hand on the cockatrice' den; but will even then the light antelope be equal to the heavy plough? Will the gentle gazelle, even in those days, pull the slow waggon of ordinary occupation?

The outward position of Cowper was, indeed, singularly fortunate. Instead of having to meet the long labours of an open profession, or the anxious decisions of a personal business, he had the choice among several lucrative and quiet public offices, in which very ordinary abilities would suffice, and scarcely any degree of incapacity would entail dismissal, or reprimand, or degradation. It seemed at first scarcely possible that even the least strenuous of men should be found unequal to duties so little arduous or exciting. He has himself said,—

> 'Lucrative offices are seldom lost
> For want of pow'rs proportion'd to the post;
> Give ev'n a dunce th' employment [he desires,
> And he soon finds the talents] it requires;
> A business with an income at its heels,
> Furnishes always oil for its own wheels.'[3]

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[1] 'Such sights as youthful poets dream.'
[2] Milton: 'L'Allegro.'
[3] 'Retirement.'

The place he chose was called the Clerkship of the Journals of the House of Lords, one of the many quiet haunts which then slumbered under the imposing shade of parliamentary and aristocratic privilege. Yet the idea of it was more than he could bear.

'In the beginning,' he writes, 'a strong opposition to my friend's right of nomination began to show itself. A powerful party was formed among the Lords to thwart it, in favour of an old enemy of the family, though one much indebted to its bounty; and it appeared plain that, if we succeeded at last, it would only be by fighting our ground by inches. Every advantage, I was told, would be sought for, and eagerly seized, to disconcert us. I was bid to expect an examination at the bar of the House, touching my sufficiency for the post I had taken. Being necessarily ignorant of the nature of that business, it became expedient that I should visit the office daily, in order to qualify myself for the strictest scrutiny. All the horror of my fears and perplexities now returned, A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence. I knew, to demonstration, that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for me. To require my attendance at the bar of the House, that I might there publicly entitle myself to the office, was, in effect, to exclude me from it. In the meantime, the interest of my friend, the honour of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward; all pressed me to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom *a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison*, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation; others can have none.

'My continual misery at length brought on a nervous fever: quiet forsook me by day, and peace by night; a finger raised against me was more than I could stand against. In this posture of mind I attended regularly at the office; where, instead of a soul upon the rack, the most active spirits were essentially necessary for my purpose. I expected no assistance from anybody there, all the inferior clerks being under the influence of my opponent; and accordingly I received none. The journal books were indeed thrown open to me—a thing which could not be refused; and from which, perhaps, a man in health, and with a head turned to business, might have gained all the information he wanted; but it was not so with me. I read without perception, and was

so distressed that, had every clerk in the office been my friend, it could have availed me little; for I was not in a condition to receive instruction, much less to elicit it out of manuscripts, without direction. Many months went over me thus employed; constant in the use of means, despairing as to the issue.'

As the time of trial drew near, his excitement rapidly increased. A short excursion into the country was attended with momentary benefit; but as soon as he returned to town he became immediately unfit for occupation, and as unsettled as ever. He grew first to wish to become mad, next to believe that he should become so, and only to be afraid that the expected delirium might not come on soon enough to prevent his appearance for examination before the Lords,—a fear, the bare existence of which shows how slight a barrier remained between him and the insanity which he fancied that he longed for. He then began to contemplate suicide, and not unnaturally called to mind a curious circumstance.

'I well recollect, too,' he writes, 'that when I was about eleven years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder, and give him my sentiments upon the question: I did so, and argued against it. My father heard my reasons, and was silent, neither approving nor disapproving; from whence I inferred that he sided with the author against me; though all the time, I believe, the true motive for his conduct was, that he wanted, if he could, to think favourably of the state of a departed friend, who had some years before destroyed himself, and whose death had struck him with the deepest affliction. But this solution of the matter never once occurred to me, and the circumstance now weighed mightily with me.'

And he made several attempts to execute his purpose, all which are related in a 'Narrative' which he drew up after his recovery; and of which the elaborate detail shows a strange and most painful tendency

to revive the slightest circumstances of delusions which it would have been most safe and most wholesome never to recall. The curiously careful style, indeed, of the narration, as elegant as that of the most flowing and felicitous letter, reminds one of nothing so much as the studiously beautiful and compact handwriting in which Rousseau used to narrate and describe the most incoherent and indefinite of his personal delusions. On the whole, nevertheless—for a long time, at least—it does not seem that the life of Cowper was in real danger. The hesitation and indeterminateness of nerve which rendered him liable to these fancies, and unequal to ordinary action, also prevented his carrying out these terrible visitations to their rigorous and fearful consequences. At last, however, there seems to have been possible, if not actual danger.

'Not one hesitating thought now remained, but I fell greedily to the execution of my purpose. My garter was made of a broad piece of scarlet binding, with a sliding buckle, being sewn together at the ends; by the help of the buckle I formed a noose, and fixed it about my neck, straining it so tight that I hardly left a passage for my breath, or for the blood to circulate; the tongue of the buckle held it fast. At each corner of the bed was placed a wreath of carved work, fastened by an iron pin, which passed up through the midst of it: the other part of the garter, which made a loop, I slipped over one of these, and hung by it some seconds, drawing up my feet under me, that they might not touch the floor; but the iron bent, and the carved work slipped off, and the garter with it. I then fastened it to the frame of the tester, winding it round, and tying it in a strong knot. The frame broke short, and let me down again.

'The third effort was more likely to succeed. I set the door open, which reached within a foot of the ceiling; by the help of a chair I could command the top of it, and the loop being large enough to admit a large angle of the door, was easily fixed so as not to slip off again. I pushed away the chair with my feet, and hung at my whole length. While I hung there, I distinctly heard a voice say three times, "*'Tis over!*" Though I am sure of the fact, and was so at the time, yet it did not at all alarm me, or affect my

resolution. I hung so long that I lost all sense, all consciousness of existence.

'When I came to myself again, I thought myself in hell; the sound of my own dreadful groans was all that I heard, and a feeling like that produced by a flash of lightning just beginning to seize upon me, passed over my whole body. In a few seconds I found myself fallen on my face to the floor. In about half a minute I recovered my feet: and, reeling and staggering, tumbled into bed again.

'By the blessed providence of God, the garter which had held me till the bitterness of temporal death was past, broke just before eternal death had taken place upon me. The stagnation of the blood under one eye, in a broad crimson spot, and a red circle round my neck, showed plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity. The latter, indeed, might have been occasioned by the pressure of the garter, but the former was certainly the effect of strangulation; for it was not attended with the sensation of a bruise, as it must have been, had I, in my fall, received one in so tender a part. And I rather think the circle round my neck was owing to the same cause; for the part was not excoriated, not at all in pain.

'Soon after I got into bed, I was surprised to hear a noise in the dining-room, where the laundress was lighting a fire; she had found the door unbolted, notwithstanding my design to fasten it, and must have passed the bed-chamber door while I was hanging on it, and yet never perceived me. She heard me fall, and presently came to ask me if I was well; adding, she feared I had been in a fit.

'I sent her to a friend, to whom I related the whole affair, and despatched him to my kinsman at the coffee-house. As soon as the latter arrived, I pointed to the broken garter, which lay in the middle of the room, and apprised him also of the attempt I had been making. His words were: "My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me! To be sure you cannot hold the office at this rate,—where is the deputation?" I gave him the key of the drawer where it was deposited; and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took it away with him; and thus ended all my connection with the Parliament office.'

It must have been a strange scene; for, so far as appears, the outward manners of Cowper had undergone no remarkable change. There was always a mild composure about them, which would have deceived any but the most experienced observer; and it is probable that Major Cowper, his 'kinsman'

and intimate friend, had very little or no suspicion of the conflict which was raging beneath his tranquil and accomplished exterior. What a contrast is the 'broad piece of scarlet binding' and the red circle, 'showing plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity,' to the daily life of the easy gentleman 'who contributed some essays to the *St. James's Magazine,* and more than one to the *St. James's Chronicle,*' living 'soft years' on a smooth superficies of existence, away from the dark realities which are, as it were, the skeleton of our life,—which seem to haunt us like a death's head throughout the narrative that has been quoted!

It was doubtless the notion of Cowper's friends that, when all idea of an examination before the Lords was removed, by the abandonment of his nomination to the office in question, the excitement which that idea had called forth would very soon pass away. But that notion was an error. A far more complicated state of mind ensued. If we may advance a theory on a most difficult as well as painful topic, we would say that religion is very rarely the proximate or impulsive cause of madness. The real and ultimate cause (as we speak) is of course that unknown something which we variously call predisposition, or malady, or defect. But the critical and exciting cause seems generally to be some comparatively trivial external occasion, which falls within the necessary lot and life of the person who becomes mad.

The inherent excitability is usually awakened by some petty casual stimulant, which looks positively not worth a thought—certainly a terribly slight agent for the wreck and havoc which it makes. The constitution of the human mind is such, that the great general questions, problems, and difficulties

of our state of being are not commonly capable of producing that result. They appear to lie too far in the distance, to require too great a stretch of imagination, to be too apt (for the very weakness of our minds' sake, perhaps) to be thrust out of view by the trivial occurrences of this desultory world,—to be too impersonal, in truth, to cause the exclusive, anxious, aching occupation which is the common prelude and occasion of insanity. Afterwards, on the other hand, when the wound is once struck, when the petty circumstance has been allowed to work its awful consequence, religion very frequently becomes the predominating topic of delusion.

It would seem as if, when the mind was once set apart by the natural consequences of the disease, and secluded from the usual occupations of, and customary contact with, other minds, it searched about through all the universe for causes of trouble and anguish. A certain pain probably exists ; and even in insanity, man is so far a rational being that he seeks and craves at least the outside and semblance of a reason for a suffering, which is really and truly without reason. Something must be found to justify its anguish to itself. And naturally the great difficulties inherent in the very position of man in this world, and trying so deeply the faith and firmness of the wariest and wisest minds, are ever ready to present plausible justifications for causeless depression. An anxious melancholy is not without very perplexing sophisms and very painful illustrations, with which a morbid mind can obtain not only a fair logical position, but even apparent argumentative victories, on many points, over the more hardy part of mankind. The acuteness of madness soon uses these in its own wretched and terrible justification. No originality of mind is necessary for so doing. Great and terrible

systems of divinity and philosophy lie round about us, which, if true, might drive a wise man mad—which read like professed exculpations of a contemplated insanity.

'To this moment,' writes Cowper, immediately after the passage which has been quoted, 'I had felt no concern of a spiritual kind.' But now a conviction fell upon him that he was eternally lost. 'All my worldly sorrows,' he says, 'seemed as if they had never been; the terrors which succeeded them seemed so great and so much more afflicting. One moment I thought myself expressly excluded by one chapter; next by another.' He thought the curse of the barren fig-tree was pronounced with an especial and designed reference to him. All day long these thoughts followed him. He lived nearly alone, and his friends were either unaware of the extreme degree to which his mind was excited, or unalive to the possible alleviation with which new scenes and cheerful society might have been attended. He fancied the people in the street stared at and despised him—that ballads were made in ridicule of him—that the voice of his conscience was externally audible. He then bethought him of a Mr. Madan, an evangelical minister, at that time held in much estimation, but who afterwards fell into disrepute by the publication of a work on marriage and its obligations (or rather its *non*-obligations), which Cowper has commented on in a controversial poem. That gentleman visited Cowper at his request, and began to explain to him the gospel.

'He spoke,' says Cowper, 'of original sin, and the corruption of every man born into the world, whereby every one is a child of wrath. I perceived something like hope dawning in my heart. This doctrine set me more on a level with the rest of mankind, and made my condition appear less desperate.

'Next he insisted on the all-atoning efficacy of the blood

of Jesus, and His righteousness, for our justification. While I heard this part of his discourse, and the Scriptures on which he founded it, my heart began to burn within me; my soul was pierced with a sense of my bitter ingratitude to so merciful a Saviour; and those tears, which I thought impossible, burst forth freely. I saw clearly that my case required such a remedy, and had not the least doubt within me but that this was the gospel of salvation.

'Lastly, he urged the necessity of a lively faith in Jesus Christ; not an assent only of the understanding, but a faith of application, an actually laying hold of it, and embracing it as a salvation wrought out for me personally. Here I failed, and deplored my want of such a faith. He told me it was the gift of God, which he trusted He would bestow upon me. I could only reply, "I wish He would:" a very irreverent petition, but a very sincere one, and such as the blessed God, in His due time, was pleased to answer.'

It does not appear that previous to this conversation he had ever distinctly realised the tenets which were afterwards to have so much influence over him. For the moment they produced a good effect, but in a few hours their novelty was over—the dark hour returned, and he awoke from slumber with a 'stronger alienation from God than ever.' The tenacity with which the mind in moments of excitement appropriates and retains very abstract tenets, that bear even in a slight degree on the topic of its excitement, is as remarkable as the facility and accuracy with which it apprehends them in the midst of so great a tumult. Many changes and many years rolled over Cowper—years of black and dark depression, years of tranquil society, of genial labour, of literary fame, but never in the lightest or darkest hour was he wholly unconscious of the abstract creed of Martin Madan. At the time, indeed, the body had its rights, and maintained them.

'While I traversed the apartment, expecting every moment that the earth would open her mouth and swallow me, my conscience scaring me, and the city of refuge out of reach and out of sight, a strange and horrible darkness fell upon me.

If it were possible that a heavy blow could light on the brain without touching the skull, such was the sensation I felt. I clapped my hand to my forehead, and cried aloud, through the pain it gave me. At every stroke my thoughts and expressions became more wild and incoherent; all that remained clear was the sense of sin, and the expectation of punishment. These kept undisturbed possession all through my illness, without interruption or abatement.'

It is idle to follow details further. The deep waters had passed over him, and it was long before the face of his mind was dry or green again.

He was placed in a lunatic asylum, where he continued many months, and which he left apparently cured. After some changes of no moment, but which by his own account evinced many traces of dangerous excitement, he took up his abode at Huntingdon, with the family of Unwin; and it is remarkable how soon the taste for easy and simple, yet not wholly unintellectual society, which had formerly characterised him, revived again. The delineation cannot be given in any terms but his own :—

'We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of these holy mysteries: at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day, and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time! If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers.

After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the

day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers.—I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our Salvation for such companions, and for such a life; above all, for an heart to like it.' [1]

The scene was not, however, to last as it was. Mr. Unwin, the husband of Mrs. Unwin, was suddenly killed soon after, and Cowper removed with Mrs. Unwin to Olney, where a new epoch of his life begins.

The curate of Olney at this time was John Newton, a man of great energy of mind, and well known in his generation for several vigorous books, and still more for a very remarkable life. He had been captain of a Liverpool slave ship—an occupation in which he had quite energy enough to have succeeded, but was deeply influenced by serious motives, and became one of the strongest and most active of the Low Church clergymen of that day. He was one of those men who seem intended to make excellence disagreeable. He was a converting engine. The whole of his own enormous vigour of body—the whole steady intensity of a pushing, impelling, compelling, unoriginal mind—all the mental or corporeal exertion he could exact from the weak or elicit from the strong, were devoted to one sole purpose—the effectual impact of the Calvinistic tenets on the parishioners of Olney. Nor would we hint that his exertions were at all useless.

There is no denying that there is a certain stiff, tough, agricultural, clayish English nature, on which

[1] Letter IX : to Mrs. Cowper, 20th October 1766.

the aggressive divine produces a visible and good effect. The hardest and heaviest hammering seems required to stir and warm that close and coarse matter. To impress any sense of the supernatural on so secular a substance is a great good, though that sense be expressed in false or irritating theories. It is unpleasant, no doubt, to hear the hammering; the bystanders are in an evil case; you might as well live near an iron-shipyard. Still, the blows do not hurt the iron. Something of the sort is necessary to beat the coarse ore into a shining and useful shape; certainly that does so beat it. But the case is different when the hundred-handed divine desires to hit others. The very system which, on account of its hard blows, is adapted to the tough and ungentle, is by that very reason unfit for the tremulous and tender. The nature of many men and many women is such that it will not bear the daily and incessant repetition of some certain and indisputable truths. The universe has of course its dark aspect. Many tremendous facts and difficulties can be found which often haunt the timid and sometimes incapacitate the feeble. To be continually insisting on these, and these only, will simply render both more and more unfit for the duties to which they were born. And if this is the case with certain fact and clear truth, how much more with uncertain error and mystic exaggeration!

Mr. Newton was alive to this consequence of his system: 'I believe my name is up about the country for preaching people mad; for whether it is owing to the sedentary life women lead here, etc. etc., I suppose we have near a dozen in different degrees disordered in their heads, and most of them, I believe, *truly gracious people*.'[1] He perhaps found his

[1] Letter to Thornton, quoted by Southey, vol. i. chap. viii.

peculiar views more generally appreciated among this class of young ladies than among more healthy and rational people, and clearly did not wholly condemn the delivering them, even at this cost, from the tyranny of the 'carnal reason.'

No more dangerous adviser, if this world had been searched over, could have been found for Cowper. What the latter required was prompt encouragement to cheerful occupation, quiet amusement, gentle and unexhausting society. Mr. Newton thought otherwise. His favourite motto was *Perimus in licitis.* The simple round of daily pleasures and genial employments which give instinctive happiness to the happiest natures, and best cheer the common life of common men, was studiously watched and scrutinised with the energy of a Puritan and the watchfulness of an inquisitor. Mr. Newton had all the tastes and habits which go to form what in the Catholic system is called a spiritual director.

Of late years it is well known that the institution, or rather practice, of confession has expanded into a more potent and more imperious organisation. You are expected by the priests of the Roman Church not only to confess to them what you have done, but to take their advice as to what you shall do. The future is under their direction, as the past was beneath their scrutiny. This was exactly the view which Mr. Newton took of his relation to Cowper. A natural aptitude for dictation—a steady, strong, compelling decision, — great self-command, and a sharp perception of all impressible points in the characters of others, — made the task of guiding 'weaker brethren' a natural and pleasant pursuit. To suppose a shrinking, a wounded, and tremulous mind like that of Cowper's would rise against such

bold dogmatism, such hard volition, such animal nerve, is to fancy that the beaten slave will dare the lash which his very eyes instinctively fear and shun.

Mr. Newton's great idea was that Cowper ought to be of some use. There was a great deal of excellent hammering hammered in the parish, and it was sinful that a man with nothing to do should sit tranquil. Several persons in the street had done what they ought not; football was not unknown; cards were played; flirtation was not conducted 'improvingly.' It was clearly Cowper's duty to put a stop to such things. Accordingly he made him a parochial implement; he set him to visit painful cases, to attend at prayer-meetings, to compose melancholy hymns, even to conduct or share in conducting public services himself. It never seems to have occurred to him that so fragile a mind would be unequal to the burden—that a bruised reed does often break; or rather, if it did occur to him, he regarded it as a subterranean suggestion, and expected a supernatural interference to counteract the events at which it hinted. Yet there are certain rules and principles in this world which seem earthly, but which the most excellent may not on that account venture to disregard. The consequence of placing Cowper in exciting situations was a return of his excitement. It is painful to observe that, though the attack resembled in all its main features his former one, several months passed before Mr. Newton would permit any proper physical remedies to be applied, and then it was too late. We need not again recount details. Many months of dark despondency were to be passed before he returned to a simple and rational mind.

The truth is that, independently of the personal activity and dauntless energy which made Mr.

Newton so little likely to sympathise with such a mind as Cowper's, the former lay under a still more dangerous disqualification for Cowper's predominant adviser, namely, an erroneous view of his case. His opinion exactly coincided with that which Cowper first heard from Mr. Madan during his first illness in London. This view is in substance that the depression which Cowper originally suffered from was exactly what almost all mankind, if they had been rightly aware of their true condition, would have suffered also. They were 'children of wrath,' just as he was; and the only difference between them was that he appreciated his state and they did not, —showing, in fact, that Cowper was not, as common persons imagined, on the extreme verge of insanity, but, on the contrary, a particularly rational and right-seeing man. 'So far,' Cowper says, with one of the painful smiles which make his 'Narrative' so melancholy, 'my condition was less desperate.' That is, his counsellors had persuaded him that his malady was rational, and his sufferings befitting his true position,—no difficult task, for they had the poignancy of pain and the pertinacity of madness on their side: the efficacy of their arguments was less when they endeavoured to make known the sources of consolation.

We have seen the immediate effect of the first exposition of the evangelical theory of faith. When applied to the case of the morbidly-despairing sinner, that theory has one argumentative imperfection which the logical sharpness of madness will soon discover and point out. The simple reply is: 'I do not feel the faith which you describe. I wish I could feel it; but it is no use trying to conceal the fact, I am conscious of nothing like it.' And this was substantially Cowper's reply on his first interview

with Mr. Madan. It was a simple denial of a fact solely accessible to his personal consciousness ; and, as such, unanswerable. And in this intellectual position (if such it can be called) his mind long rested. At the commencement of his residence at Olney, however, there was a decided change. Whether it were that he mistook the glow of physical recovery for the peace of spiritual renovation, or that some subtler and deeper agency was, as he supposed, at work, the outward sign is certain ; and there is no question but that during the first months of his residence at Olney, and his daily intercourse with Mr. Newton, he did feel, or supposed himself to feel, the faith which he was instructed to deem desirable, and he lent himself with natural pleasure to the diffusion of it among those around him. But this theory of salvation requires a metaphysical postulate, which to many minds is simply impossible.

A prolonged meditation on unseen realities is sufficiently difficult, and seems scarcely the occupation for which common human nature was intended ; but more than this is said to be essential. The meditation must be successful in exciting certain feelings of a kind peculiarly delicate, subtle, and (so to speak) unstable. The wind bloweth where it listeth ; but it is scarcely more partial, more quick, more unaccountable, than the glow of an emotion excited by a supernatural and unseen object. This depends on the vigour of imagination which has to conceive that object—on the vivacity of feeling which has to be quickened by it—on the physical energy which has to support it. The very watchfulness, the scrupulous anxiety to find and retain the feeling, are exactly the most unfavourable to it. In a delicate disposition like that of Cowper, such feelings revolt from the inquisition of others, and shrink from the

stare of the mind itself. But even this was not the worst. The mind of Cowper was, so to speak, naturally terrestrial. If a man wishes for a nice appreciation of the details of time and sense, let him consult Cowper's miscellaneous letters. Each simple event of every day—each petty object of external observation or inward suggestion, is there chronicled with a fine and female fondness, a wise and happy faculty, let us say, of deriving a gentle happiness from the tranquil and passing hour. The fortunes of the hares—Bess who died young, and Tiney who lived to be nine years old—the miller who engaged their affections at once, his powdered coat having charms that were irresistible—the knitting-needles of Mrs. Unwin—the qualities of his friend Hill, who managed his money transactions—

> 'An honest man, close buttoned to the chin,
> Broadcloth without, and a warm heart within'—

live in his pages, and were the natural, insensible, unbiassed occupants of his fancy.

It is easy for a firm and hard mind to despise the minutiæ of life, and to pore and brood over an abstract proposition. It may be possible for the highest, the strongest, the most arduous imagination to live aloof from common things—alone with the unseen world, as some [have] lived their whole lives in memory with a world which has passed away. But it seems hardly possible that an imagination such as Cowper's —which was rather a detective fancy, perceiving the charm and essence of things which are seen, than an eager, actuating, conceptive power, embodying, enlivening, empowering those which are not seen—should leave its own home—the *domus et tellus*—the sweet fields and rare orchards which it loved,—and go out alone apart from all flesh into the trackless and

fearful and unknown Infinite. Of course, his timid mind shrank from it at once, and returned to its own fireside. After a little, the idea that he had a true faith faded away. Mr. Newton, with misdirected zeal, sought to revive it by inciting him to devotional composition; but the only result was the volume of 'Olney Hymns'—a very painful record, of which the burthen is—

'My former hopes are fled,
My terror now begins;
I feel, alas! that I am dead
In trespasses and sins.

'Ah, whither shall I fly?
I hear the thunder roar;
The law proclaims destruction nigh,
And vengeance at the door.'

'The Preacher' himself did not conceive such a store of melancholy forebodings.

The truth is that there are two remarkable species of minds on which the doctrine of Calvinism acts as a deadly and fatal poison. One is the natural, vigorous, bold, defiant, hero-like character, abounding in generosity, in valour, in vigour, and abounding also in self-will, and pride, and scorn. This is the temperament which supplies the world with ardent hopes and keen fancies, with springing energies, and bold plans, and noble exploits; but yet, under another aspect and in other times, is equally prompt in desperate deeds, awful machinations, deep and daring crimes. It one day is ready by its innate heroism to deliver the world from any tyranny; the next it 'hungers to become a tyrant' in its turn. Yet the words of the poet are ever true and are ever good, as a defence against the cold narrators who mingle its misdeeds and exploits, and profess to

believe that each is a set-off and compensation for the other. You can ever say,—

> 'Still he retained,
> 'Mid much abasement, what he had received
> From nature, an intense and glowing mind.' [1]

It is idle to tell such a mind that, by an arbitrary irrespective election, it is chosen to happiness or doomed to perdition. The evil and the good in it equally revolt at such terms. It thinks: 'Well, if the universe be a tyrant, if one man is doomed to misery for no fault, and the next is chosen to pleasure for no merit—if the favouritism of time be copied into eternity—if the highest heaven be indeed like the meanest earth,—then, as the heathen say, it is better to suffer injustice than to inflict it, better to be the victims of the eternal despotism than its ministers, better to curse in hell than serve in heaven.' And the whole burning soul breaks away into what is well called Satanism—into wildness, and bitterness, and contempt.

Cowper had as little in common with this proud, Titanic, aspiring genius as any man has or can have, but his mind was equally injured by the same system. On a timid, lounging, gentle, acquiescent mind, the effect is precisely the contrary—singularly contrasted, but equally calamitous. 'I am doomed, you tell me, already. One way or other the matter is already settled. It can be no better, and it is as bad as it can be. Let me alone; do not trouble at least these few years. Let me at least sit sadly and bewail myself. Action is useless. I will brood upon my melancholy and be at rest;' the soul sinks into 'passionless calm and silence unreproved,' [2] flinging

[1] Wordsworth: *Excursion*, book ii.
[2] Shelley: 'The Sunset.'

away 'the passionate tumult of a clinging hope,'[1] which is the allotted boon and happiness of mortality.

It was, as we believe, straight towards this terrible state that Mr. Newton directed Cowper. He kept him occupied with subjects which were too great for him; he kept him away from his natural life; he presented to him views and opinions but too well justifying his deep and dark insanity; he convinced him that he ought to experience emotions which were foreign to his nature; he had nothing to add by way of comfort, when told that those emotions did not and could not exist. Cowper seems to have felt this. His second illness commenced with a strong dislike to his spiritual adviser, and it may be doubted if there ever was again the same cordiality between them.

Mr. Newton, too, as was natural, was vexed at Cowper's calamity. His reputation in the 'religious world' was deeply pledged to conducting this most 'interesting case' to a favourable termination. A failure was not to be contemplated, and yet it was obviously coming and coming. It was to no purpose that Cowper acquired fame and secular glory in the literary world. This was rather adding gall to bitterness. The unbelievers in evangelical religion would be able to point to one at least, and that the best known among its proselytes, to whom it had not brought peace—whom it had rather confirmed in wretchedness. His literary fame, too, took Cowper away into a larger circle, out of the rigid decrees and narrow ordinances of his father-confessor, and of course the latter remonstrated. Altogether there was not a cessation, but a decline and diminution of intercourse. But better, according to the saying,

[1] Shelley: 'Alastor.'

had they 'never met or never parted.'[1] If a man is to have a father-confessor, let him at least choose a sensible one.

The dominion of Mr. Newton had been exercised, not indeed with mildness, or wisdom, or discrimination, but, nevertheless, with strong judgment and coarse acumen—with a bad choice of ends, but at least a vigorous selection of means. Afterwards it was otherwise. In the village of Olney there was a schoolmaster, whose name often occurs in Cowper's letters,—a foolish, vain, worthy sort of man: what the people of the west call a 'scholard,' that is, a man of more knowledge and less sense than those about him. He sometimes came to Cowper to beg old clothes, sometimes to instruct him with literary criticisms, and is known in the 'Correspondence' as 'Mr. Teedon, who reads the *Monthly Review*,' 'Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame.' Yet to this man, whose harmless follies his humour had played with a thousand times, Cowper, in his later years, and when the dominion of Mr. Newton had so far ceased as to leave him, after many years, the use of his own judgment, resorted for counsel and guidance. And the man had visions, and dreams, and revelations! But enough of such matters.

The peculiarity of Cowper's life is its division into marked periods. From his birth to his first illness he may be said to have lived in one world, and for some twenty years afterwards, from his thirty-second to about his fiftieth year, in a wholly distinct one. Much of the latter time was spent in hopeless despondency. His principal companions during that period were Mr. Newton, about whom we have been writing, and Mrs. Unwin, who may be said to have broken the charmed circle of seclusion in which

[1] Burns: 'Ae fond kiss.'

they lived by inciting Cowper to continuous literary composition. Of Mrs. Unwin herself ample memorials remain. She was, in truth, a most excellent person —in mind and years much older than the poet—as it were by profession elderly, able in every species of preserve, profound in salts, and pans, and jellies; culinary by taste; by tact and instinct motherly and housewifish. She was not, however, without some less larderiferous qualities. Lady Hesketh and Lady Austen, neither of them very favourably prejudiced critics, decided so. The former has written: 'She is very far from grave; on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words which fall from her *de tems en tems*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety. . . . I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way.' This she showed by persuading Cowper to the composition of his first volume.

As a poet, Cowper belongs, though with some differences, to the school of Pope. Great question, as is well known, has been raised whether that very accomplished writer was a poet at all; and a secondary and equally debated question runs side by side, whether, if a poet, he were a great one. With the peculiar genius and personal rank of Pope we have in this article nothing to do. But this much may be safely said, that, according to the definition which has been ventured of the poetical art, by the greatest and most accomplished master of the other school, his works are delicately finished specimens of artistic excellence in one branch of it. 'Poetry,' says Shelley, who was surely a good judge, 'is the ex-

pression of the imagination,' [1] by which he meant, of course, not only the expression of the interior sensations accompanying the faculty's employment, but likewise, and more emphatically, the exercise of it in the delineation of objects which attract it. Now, society, viewed as a whole, is clearly one of those objects.

There is a vast assemblage of human beings, of all nations, tongues, and languages, each with ideas, and a personality and a cleaving mark of its own, yet each having somewhat that resembles something of all, much that resembles a part of many—a motley regiment, of various forms, of a million impulses, passions, thoughts, fancies, motives, actions; a 'many-headed monster thing;' a Bashi Bazouk array; a clown to be laughed at; a hydra to be spoken evil of; yet, in fine, our all—the very people of the whole earth. There is nothing in nature more attractive to the fancy than this great spectacle and congregation. Since Herodotus went to and fro to the best of his ability over all the earth, the spectacle of civilisation has ever drawn to itself the quick eyes and quick tongues of seeing and roving men. Not only, says Goethe, is man ever interesting to man, but 'properly there is nothing else interesting.' There is a distinct subject for poetry—at least according to Shelley's definition—in selecting and working out, in idealising, in combining, in purifying, in intensifying the great features and peculiarities which make society, as a whole, interesting, remarkable, fancy-taking.

No doubt it is not the object of poetry to versify the works of the eminent narrators, 'to prose,' according to a disrespectful description, 'o'er books

[1] 'Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the imagination."'—*Essays*: 'A Defence of Poetry.'

of travelled seamen,' to chill you with didactic icebergs, to heat you with torrid sonnets. The difficulty of reading such local narratives is now great—so great that a gentleman in the reviewing department once wished 'one man would go everywhere and say everything,' in order that the limit of his labour at least might be settled and defined. And it would certainly be much worse if palm-trees were of course to be in rhyme, and the dinner of the migrator only recountable in blank verse. We do not wish this. We only maintain that there are certain principles, causes, passions, affections, acting on and influencing communities at large, permeating their life, ruling their principles, directing their history, working as a subtle and wandering principle over all their existence. These have a somewhat abstract character, as compared with the soft ideals and passionate incarnations of purely individual character, and seem dull beside the stirring lays of eventful times in which the earlier and bolder poets delight.

Another cause co-operates. The tendency of civilisation is to pare away the oddness and licence of personal character, and to leave a monotonous agreeableness as the sole trait and comfort of mankind. This obviously tends to increase the efficacy of general principles, to bring to view the daily efficacy of constant causes, to suggest the hidden agency of subtle abstractions. Accordingly, as civilisation augments and philosophy grows, we commonly find a school of 'common-sense' poets, as they may be called, arise and develop, who proceed to depict what they see around them, to describe its *natura naturans*, to delineate its *natura naturata*, to evolve productive agencies, to teach subtle ramifications.

Complete, as the most characteristic specimen of

this class of poets, stands Pope. He was, some one we think has said, the sort of person we cannot even conceive existing in a barbarous age. His subject was not life at large, but fashionable life. He described the society in which he was thrown—the people among whom he lived. His mind was a hoard of small maxims, a quintessence of petty observations. When he described character, he described it, not dramatically, nor as it is in itself; but observantly and from without, calling up in the mind not so much a vivid conception of the man, of the real, corporeal, substantial being, as an idea of the idea which a metaphysical bystander might refine and excruciate concerning him. Society in Pope is scarcely a society of people, but of pretty little atoms, coloured and painted with hoops or in coats—a miniature of metaphysics, a puppet-show of sylphs. He elucidates the doctrine that the tendency of civilised poetry is towards an analytic sketch of the existing civilisation. Nor is the effect diminished by the pervading character of keen judgment and minute intrusive sagacity; for no great painter of English life can be without a rough sizing of strong sense, or he would fail from want of sympathy with his subject. Pope exemplifies the class and type of 'common-sense' poets who substitute an animated '*catalogue raisonné*' of working thoughts and operative principles—a sketch of the then present society, as a whole and as an object, for the κλεα ανδρων the tale of which is one subject of early verse, and the stage effect of living, loving, passionate, impetuous men and women, which is the special topic of another.

What Pope is to our fashionable and town life, Cowper is to our domestic and rural life. This is perhaps the reason why he is so national. It has been said no foreigner can live in the country. We

doubt whether any people, who felt their whole heart and entire exclusive breath of their existence to be concentrated in a great capital, could or would appreciate such intensely provincial pictures as are the entire scope of Cowper's delineation. A good many imaginative persons are really plagued with him. Everything is so comfortable; the tea-urn hisses so plainly, the toast is so warm, the breakfast so neat, the food so edible, that one turns away, in excitable moments, a little angrily from anything so quiet, tame, and sober. Have we not always hated this life?

What can be worse than regular meals, clock-moving servants, a time for everything, and everything then done, a place for everything, without the Irish alleviation—'Sure and I'm rejiced to say, that's jist and exactly where it isn't,' a common gardener, a slow parson, a heavy assortment of near relations, a placid house flowing with milk and sugar—all that the fates can stuff together of substantial comfort, and fed and fatted monotony? Aspiring and excitable youth stoutly maintains it can endure anything much better than the 'gross fog Bœotian'—the torpid, in-door, tea-tabular felicity. Still, a great deal of tea is really consumed in the English nation. A settled and practical people are distinctly in favour of heavy relaxations, placid prolixities, slow comforts. A state between the mind and the body, something intermediate half-way from the newspaper to a nap—this is what we may call the middle-life theory of the influential English gentleman—the true aspiration of the ruler of the world.

> 'Tis then[1] the understanding takes repose
> In indolent vacuity of thought,

[1] 'thus.'

> And sleeps and is refresh'd. Meanwhile the face
> Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask
> Of deep deliberation.' [1]

It is these in-door scenes, this common world, this gentle round of ' calm delights,' the trivial course of slowly-moving pleasures, the petty detail of quiet relaxation, that Cowper excels in. The post-boy, the winter's evening, the newspaper, the knitting-needles, the stockings, the waggon—these are his subjects. His sure popularity arises from his having held up to the English people exact delineations of what they really prefer. Perhaps one person in four hundred understands Wordsworth, about one in eight thousand may appreciate Shelley, but there is no expressing the small fraction who do not love dullness, who do not enter into—

> ' Home-born happiness,
> Fireside enjoyments, intimate delights,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know.'

His objection to the more exciting and fashionable pleasures was perhaps, in an extreme analysis, that they put him out. They were too great a task for his energies—asked too much for his spirits. His comments on them rather remind us of Mr. Rushworth—Miss Austen's heavy hero's remark on the theatre : ' I think we went on much better by ourselves before this was thought of, doing, doing, doing *nothing*.'

The subject of these pictures, in point of interest, may be what we choose to think it, but there is no denying great merit to the execution. The sketches have the highest merit—suitableness of style. It would be absurd to describe a post-boy as sonneteers

[1] ' The Task,' book iv. l. 296.

their mistress[es]—to cover his plain face with fine similes—to put forward the 'brow of Egypt'—to stick metaphors upon him, as the Americans upon General Washington. The only merit such topics have room for is an easy and dexterous plainness—a sober suit of well-fitting expressions—a free, working, flowing, picturesque garb of words adapted to the solid conduct of a sound and serious world, and this merit Cowper's style has. On the other hand, it entirely wants the higher and rarer excellences of poetical expression. There is none of the choice art which has studiously selected the words of one class of great poets, or the rare, untaught, unteachable felicity which has vivified those of others. No one, in reading Cowper, stops as if to draw his breath more deeply over words which do not so much express or clothe poetical ideas, as seem to intertwine, coalesce, and be blended with, the very essence of poetry itself.

Of course a poet could not deal in any measure with such subjects as Cowper dealt with, and not become inevitably, to a certain extent, satirical. The ludicrous is in some sort the imagination of common life. The 'dreary intercourse'[1] of which Wordsworth makes mention, would be dreary, unless some people possessed more than he did the faculty of making fun. A universe in which Dignity No. I. conversed decorously with Dignity No. II. on topics befitting their state, would be perhaps a levee of great intellects and a tea-table of enormous thoughts; but it would want the best charm of this earth—the medley of great things and little, of things mundane and things celestial, things low and things awful, of things eternal and things of half a minute. It is in this contrast that humour and satire have their place

[1] 'The dreary intercourse of daily life:' 'Tintern Abbey.'

—pointing out the intense unspeakable incongruity of the groups and juxtapositions of our world.

To all of these which fell under his own eye, Cowper was alive. A gentle sense of propriety and consistency in daily things was evidently characteristic of him; and if he fail of the highest success in this species of art, it is not from an imperfect treatment of the scenes and conceptions which he touched, but from the fact that the follies with which he deals are not the greatest follies—that there are deeper absurdities in human life than 'John Gilpin' touches upon—that the superficial occurrences of ludicrous life do not exhaust, or even deeply test, the mirthful resources of our minds and fortunes.

As a scold, we think Cowper failed. He had a great idea of the use of railing, and there are many pages of laudable invective against various vices which we feel no call whatever to defend. But a great vituperator had need to be a great hater; and of any real rage, any such gall and bitterness as great and irritable satirists have in other ages let loose upon men, of any thorough, brooding, burning, abiding detestation, he was as incapable as a tame hare. His vituperation reads like the mild man's whose wife ate up his dinner, 'Really, sir, I feel quite *angry*!' Nor has his language any of the sharp intrusive acumen which divides in sunder both soul and spirit, and makes fierce and unforgetable reviling.

Some people may be surprised, notwithstanding our lengthy explanation, at hearing Cowper treated as of the school of Pope. It has been customary, at least with some critics, to speak of him as one of those who recoiled from the artificiality of that great writer, and at least commenced a return to a simple delineation of outward nature. And of course there

is considerable truth in this idea. The poetry (if such it is) of Pope would be just as true if all the trees were yellow and all the grass fish-colour. He did not care for 'snowy scalps,' or 'rolling streams,' or 'icy halls,' or 'precipice's gloom.' Nor, for that matter, did Cowper either. He, as Hazlitt most justly said, was as much afraid of a shower of rain as any man that ever lived.[1]

At the same time, the fashionable life described by Pope has no reference whatever to the beauties of the material universe, never regards them, could go on just as well in the soft, sloppy, gelatinous existence which Dr. Whewell (who knows) says is alone possible in Jupiter and Saturn. But the rural life of Cowper's poetry has a constant and necessary reference to the country, is identified with its features, cannot be separated from it even in fancy. Green fields and a slow river seem all the material of beauty Cowper had given him. But, what was more to the purpose, his attention was well concentrated upon them. As he himself said, he did not go more than thirteen [? thirty] miles from home for twenty years, and very seldom as far. He was, therefore, well able to find out all that was charming in Olney and its neighbourhood, and as it presented nothing which is not to be found in any of the fresh rural parts of England, what he has left us is really a delicate description and appreciative delineation of the simple essential English country.

However, it is to be remarked that the description

[1] 'With all his boasted simplicity and love of the country, he seldom launches out into general descriptions of nature; he looks at her over his clipped hedges, and from his well-swept garden walks; or, if he makes a bolder experiment now and then, it is with an air of precaution, as if he were afraid of being caught in a shower of rain, or of not being able, in case of any untoward accident, to make good his retreat home.'—*Lectures on the English Poets.*

of nature in Cowper differs altogether from the peculiar delineation of the same subject, which has been so influential in more recent times, and which bears, after its greatest master, the name Wordsworthian. To Cowper Nature is simply a background, a beautiful background no doubt, but still essentially a *locus in quo*—a space in which the work and mirth of life pass and are performed. A more professed delineation does not occur than the following :—

> 'O Winter! ruler of the inverted year,
> Thy scattered hair with sleet-like ashes filled,
> Thy breath congealed upon thy lips, thy cheeks
> Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
> Than those of age, thy forehead wrapped in clouds,
> A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
> A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
> But urged by storms along its slippery way;
> I love thee, all unlovely as thou seemest,
> And dreaded as thou art. Thou holdest the sun
> A prisoner in the yet undawning east,
> Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
> And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,
> Down to the rosy west; but kindly still
> Compensating his loss with added hours
> Of social converse and instructive ease,
> And gathering, at short notice, in one group
> The family dispersed, and fixing thought,
> Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares
> I crown thee King of intimate delights,
> Fireside enjoyments, home-born happiness,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know.
> No rattling wheels stop short before these gates.' [1]

After a very few lines he returns within doors to the occupation of man and woman—to human tasks and human pastimes. To Wordsworth, on the contrary, Nature is a religion. So far from being unwilling to treat her as a special object of study, he hardly thought any other equal or comparable. He was so

[1] 'The Task,' book IV. l. 120.

far from holding the doctrine that the earth was made for men to live in, that it would rather seem as if he thought men were created to see the earth. The whole aspect of Nature was to him a special revelation of an immanent and abiding power—a breath of the pervading art—a smile of the Eternal Mind—according to the lines which everyone knows,—

> 'A sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.' [1]

Of this haunting, supernatural, mystical view of Nature Cowper never heard. Like the strong old lady who said, '*She* was born before nerves were invented,' he may be said to have lived before the awakening of the detective sensibility which reveals this deep and obscure doctrine.

In another point of view, also, Cowper is curiously contrasted with Wordsworth, as a delineator of Nature. The delineation of Cowper is a simple delineation. He makes a sketch of the object before him, and there he leaves it. Wordsworth, on the contrary, is not satisfied unless he describe not only the bare outward object which others see, but likewise the reflected high-wrought feelings which that object excites in a brooding, self-conscious mind. His subject was not so much Nature, as Nature reflected by Wordsworth. Years of deep musing and long introspection had made him familiar with every shade and shadow in the many-coloured impression which the universe makes on meditative genius and observant sensibility. Now these feelings Cowper did

[1] Wordsworth: 'Tintern Abbey.'

not describe, because, to all appearance, he did not perceive them. He had a great pleasure in watching the common changes and common aspects of outward things, but he was not invincibly prone to brood and pore over their reflex effects upon his own mind.

> 'A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more.' [1]

According to the account which Cowper at first gave of his literary occupations, his entire design was to communicate the religious views to which he was then a convert. He fancied that the vehicle of verse might bring many to listen to truths which they would be disinclined to have stated to them in simple prose. And however tedious the recurrence of these theological tenets may be to the common reader, it is certain that a considerable portion of Cowper's peculiar popularity may be traced to their expression. He is the one poet of a class which have no poets. In that once large and still considerable portion of the English world which regards the exercise of the fancy and the imagination as dangerous—snares, as they speak—distracting the soul from an intense consideration of abstract doctrine, Cowper's strenuous inculcation of those doctrines has obtained for him a certain toleration. Of course all verse is perilous. The use of single words is harmless, but the employment of two, in such a manner as to form a rhyme—the regularities of interval and studied recurrence of the same sound, evince an attention to time, and a partiality to things of sense. Most poets must be prohibited ; the exercise of the fancy requires watching. But Cowper is a ticket-of-leave man. He has the chaplain's certificate. He

[1] Wordsworth : 'Peter Bell,' Part I. st. 12.

has expressed himself 'with the utmost propriety.' The other imaginative criminals must be left to the fates, but he may be admitted to the sacred drawing-room, though with constant care and scrupulous *surveillance*.

Perhaps, however, taken in connection with his diseased and peculiar melancholy, these tenets really add to the artistic effect of Cowper's writings. The free discussion of daily matters, the delicate delineation of domestic detail, the passing narrative of fugitive occurrences, would seem light and transitory, if it were not broken by the interruption of a terrible earnestness, and relieved by the dark background of a deep and foreboding sadness. It is scarcely artistic to describe the 'painted veil which those who live call life,'[1] and leave wholly out of view and undescribed 'the chasm sightless and drear,' which lies always beneath and around it.

It is of 'The Task' more than of Cowper's earlier volume of poems that a critic of his poetry must more peculiarly be understood to speak. All the best qualities of his genius are there concentrated, and the alloy is less than elsewhere. He was fond of citing the saying of Dryden, that the rhyme had often helped him to a thought—a great but very perilous truth. The difficulty is, that the rhyme so frequently helps to the wrong thought—that the stress of the mind is recalled from the main thread of the poem, from the narrative, or sentiment, or delineation, to some wayside remark or fancy, which the casual resemblance of final sound suggests. This is fatal,

[1] 'Lift not the painted veil which those who live
Call life: though unreal shapes be pictured there,
. . . . . behind lurk Fear
And Hope, twin destinies; who ever weave
Their shadows, o'er the chasm, sightless and drear.'
Shelley: 'Sonnet to a Reviewer.'

unless either a poet's imagination be so hot and determined as to bear upon its objects, and to be unwilling to hear the voice of any charmer who might distract it, or else the nature of the poem itself should be of so desultory a character that it does not much matter about the sequence of the thought —at least within great and ample limits, as in some of Swift's casual rhymes, where the sound is in fact the connecting link of unity.

Now Cowper is not often in either of these positions ; he always has a thread of argument on which he is hanging his illustrations, and yet he has not the exclusive interest or the undeviating energetic downrightness of mind which would ensure his going through it without idling or turning aside ; consequently the thoughts which the rhyme suggests are constantly breaking in upon the main matter, destroying the emphatic unity which is essential to rhythmical delineation. His blank verse of course is exempt from this defect, and there is moreover something in the nature of the metre which fits it for the expression of studious and quiet reflection.

'The Task' too was composed at the healthiest period of Cowper's later life, in the full vigour of his faculties, and with the spur [that] the semi-recognition of his first volume had made it a common subject of literary discussion, whether he was a poet or not. Many men could endure—as indeed all but about ten do actually in every generation endure—to be without this distinction ; but few could have an idea that it was a frequent point of argument whether they were duly entitled to possess it or not, without at least a strong desire to settle the question by some work of decisive excellence. This 'The Task' achieved for Cowper. Since its publication his name has been a household word—a particularly

household word in English literature. The story of its composition is connected with one of the most curious incidents in Cowper's later life, and has given occasion to a good deal of writing.

In the summer of 1781 it happened that two ladies called at a shop exactly opposite the house at Olney where Cowper and Mrs. Unwin resided. One of these was a familiar and perhaps tame object,—a Mrs. Jones,—the wife of a neighbouring parson ; the other, however, was so striking that Cowper, one of the shyest and least demonstrative of men, immediately asked Mrs. Unwin to invite her to tea. This was a great event, as it would appear that few or no social interruptions, casual or contemplated, then varied what Cowper called the ' duality of his existence.' This favoured individual was Lady Austen, a person of what Mr. Hayley terms ' colloquial talents ; ' in truth an energetic, vivacious, amusing, and rather handsome lady of the world. She had been much in France, and is said to have caught the facility of manner and love of easy society which is the unchanging characteristic of that land of change. She was a fascinating person in the great world, and it is not difficult to imagine she must have been an excitement indeed at Olney. She was, however, most gracious ; fell in love, as Cowper says, not only with him but with Mrs. Unwin ; was called ' Sister Ann,' laughed and made laugh, was every way so great an acquisition that his seeing her appeared to him to show ' strong marks of providential interposition.' He thought her superior to the curate's wife, who was a ' valuable person,' but had a family, etc. etc.

The new acquaintance had much to contribute to the Olney conversation. She had seen much of the world, and probably seen it well, and had at least a

good deal to narrate concerning it. Among other interesting matters, she one day recounted to Cowper the story of John Gilpin, as one which she had heard in childhood, and in a short time the poet sent her the ballad, which every one has liked ever since. It was written, he says, no doubt truly, in order to relieve a fit of terrible and uncommon despondency; but altogether, for a few months after the introduction of this new companion, he was more happy and animated than at any other time after his first illness. Clouds, nevertheless, began to show themselves soon. The circumstances are of the minute and female kind, which it would require a good deal of writing to describe, even if we knew them perfectly. The original cause of misconstruction was a rather romantic letter of Lady Austen, drawing a sublime picture of what she expected from Cowper's friendship. Mr. Scott, the clergyman at Olney, who had taken the place of Mr. Newton, and who is described as a dry and sensible man, gave a short account of what he thought was the real embroilment. 'Who,' said he, 'can be surprised that two women should be daily in the society of one man and then quarrel with *one another?*' Cowper's own description shows how likely this was.

'From a scene of most uninterrupted retirement,' he says to Mr. Unwin, 'we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement; not that our society is much multiplied. The addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's *chateau*. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules and Sampson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions, and other amusements of that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant, and beg to be excused.' [1]

[1] Letter LXVIII: 19th January 1783.

Things were in this state when she suggested to him the composition of a new poem of some length in blank verse, and on being asked to suggest a subject, said : Well, write upon that sofa, whence is the title of the first book of ' The Task.' According to Cowper's own account, it was this poem which was the cause of the ensuing dissension.

' On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my own particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second,) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began the Task ; for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten : and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing ; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect the Task, to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill health, and before I had quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol.' [1]

And it is possible that this is the true account of the matter. Yet we fancy there is a kind of awkwardness and constraint in the manner in which it is spoken of. Of course the plain and literal portion of mankind have set it down at once that Cowper was in love with Lady Austen, just as they married him over and over again to Mrs. Unwin. But of a strong passionate love, as we have before explained, we do not think Cowper capable, and there are certainly no signs of it in this case. There is, however, one odd circumstance. Years after, when no longer capable of original composition, he was fond of hearing all his poems read to him except ' John

[1] Letter to Lady Hesketh : 16th January 1786. [F.M.]

Gilpin.' There were recollections, he said, connected with those verses which were too painful. Did he mean, the worm that dieth not—the reminiscence of the animated narratress of that not intrinsically melancholy legend ?

The literary success of Cowper opened to him a far larger circle of acquaintance, and connected him in close bonds with many of his relations, who had looked with an unfavourable eye at the peculiar tenets which he had adopted, and the peculiar and recluse life which he had been advised to lead. It is to these friends and acquaintance that we owe that copious correspondence on which so much of Cowper's fame at present rests.

The complete letter-writer is now an unknown animal. In the last century, when communications were difficult, and epistles rare, there were a great many valuable people who devoted a good deal of time to writing elaborate letters. You wrote letters to a man whom you knew nineteen years and a half ago, and told him what you had for dinner, and what your second cousin said, and how the crops got on. Every detail of life was described and dwelt on, and improved. The art of writing, at least of writing easily, was comparatively rare, which kept the number of such compositions within narrow limits. Sir Walter Scott says he knew a man who remembered that the London post-bag once came to Edinburgh with only one letter in it. One can fancy the solemn conscientious elaborateness with which a person would write, with the notion that his letter would have a whole coach and a whole bag to itself, and travel two hundred miles alone, the exclusive object of a red guard's care. The only thing like it now—the deferential minuteness with which one public office writes to another, conscious that the letter will

travel on her Majesty's service three doors down the passage—sinks by comparison into cursory brevity.

No administrative reform will be able to bring even the official mind of these days into the grave inch-an-hour conscientiousness with which a confidential correspondent of a century ago related the growth of apples, the manufacture of jams, the appearance of flirtations, and other such like things. All the ordinary incidents of an easy life were made the most of; a party was epistolary capital, a race a mine of wealth. So deeply sentimental was this intercourse, that it was much argued whether the affections were created for the sake of ink, or ink for the sake of the affections. Thus it continued for many years, and the fruits thereof are written in the volumes of family papers, which daily appear, are praised as 'materials for the historian,' and consigned, as the case may be, to posterity or oblivion. All this has now passed away. Mr. Rowland Hill is entitled to the credit, not only of introducing stamps, but also of destroying letters. The amount of annotations which will be required to make the notes of this day intelligible to posterity is a wonderful idea, and no quantity of comment will make them readable. You might as well publish a collection of telegraphs. The careful detail, the studious minuteness, the circumstantial statement of a former time, is exchanged for a curt brevity or only half-intelligible narration. In old times, letters were written for people who knew nothing and required to be told everything. Now they are written for people who know everything except the one thing which the letter is designed to explain to them. It is impossible in some respects not to regret the old practice.

It is well that each age should write for itself a faithful account of its habitual existence. We do

this to a certain extent in novels, but novels are difficult materials for an historian. They raise a cause and a controversy as to how far they are really faithful delineations. Mr. Macaulay is even now under criticism for his use of the plays of the seventeenth century. Letters are generally true on certain points. The least veracious man will tell truly the colour of his coat, the hour of his dinner, the materials of his shoes. The unconscious delineation of a recurring and familiar life is beyond the reach of a fraudulent fancy. Horace Walpole was not a very scrupulous narrator; yet it was too much trouble even for him to tell lies on many things. His set stories and conspicuous scandals are no doubt often unfounded, but there is a gentle undercurrent of daily unremarkable life and manners which he evidently assumed as a datum for his historical imagination. Whence posterity will derive this for the times of Queen Victoria it is difficult to fancy. Even memoirs are no resource; they generally leave out the common life, and try at least to bring out the uncommon events.

It is evident that this species of composition exactly harmonised with the temperament and genius of Cowper. Detail was his forte and quietness his element. Accordingly, his delicate humour plays over perhaps a million letters, mostly descriptive of events which no one else would have thought worth narrating, and yet which, when narrated, show to us, and will show to persons to whom it will be yet more strange, the familiar, placid, easy, ruminating, provincial existence of our great-grandfathers. Slow, Olney might be,—indescribable, it certainly was not. We seem to have lived there ourselves.

The most copious subject of Cowper's correspondence is his translation of Homer. This was

published by subscription, and it is pleasant to observe the healthy facility with which one of the shyest men in the world set himself to extract guineas from every one he had ever heard of. In several cases he was very successful. The University of Oxford, he tells us, declined, as of course it would, to recognise the principle of subscribing towards literary publications; but other public bodies and many private persons were more generous. It is to be wished that their aid had contributed to the production of a more pleasing work.

The fact is, Cowper was not like Agamemnon. The most conspicuous feature in the Greek heroes is a certain brisk, decisive activity, which always strikes and always likes to strike. This quality is faithfully represented in the poet himself. Homer is the briskest of men. The Germans have denied that there was any such person; but they have never questioned his extreme activity. 'From what you tell me, sir,' said an American, 'I should like to have read Homer. I should say he was a go-ahead party.' Now this is exactly what Cowper was not. His genius was domestic, and tranquil, and calm. He had no sympathy, or little sympathy, even with the common, half-asleep activities of a refined society; an evening party was too much for him; a day's hunt a preposterous excitement. It is absurd to expect a man like this to sympathise with the stern stimulants of a barbaric age, with a race who fought because they liked it, and a poet who sang of fighting because he thought their taste judicious.

As if to make matters worse, Cowper selected a metre in which it would be scarcely possible for any one, however gifted, to translate Homer. The two kinds of metrical composition most essentially opposed to one another are ballad poetry and blank

verse. The very nature of the former requires a marked pause and striking rhythm. Every line should have a distinct end and a clear beginning. It is like martial music, there should be a tramp in the very versification of it.

> 'Armour rusting in his halls,
> On the blood of Clifford calls ;—
> "Quell the Scot," exclaims the Lance,—
> Bear me to the heart of France,
> Is the longing of the Shield—
> Tell thy name, thou trembling Field ;
> Field of death, where'er thou be,
> Groan thou with our victory ! '[1]

And this is the tone of Homer. The grandest of human tongues marches forward with its proudest steps : the clearest tones call forward—the most marked of metres carries him on :—

> 'Like a reappearing star,
> Like a glory from afar—'

he ever heads, and will head, 'the flock of war.' Now blank verse is the exact opposite of all this. Dr. Johnson laid down that it was verse only to the eye, which was a bold dictum. But, without going this length, it will be safe to say that of all considerable metres in our language it has the least distinct conclusion, least decisive repetition, the least trumpet-like rhythm ; and it is this of which Cowper made choice.

He had an idea that extreme literalness was an unequalled advantage, and logically reasoned that it was easier to do this in that metre than in any other. He did not quite hold with Mr. Cobbett that the 'gewgaw fetters of rhyme were invented by the monks to enslave the people ; ' but as a man who had due experience of both, he was aware that it is easier to write two lines of different endings than

[1] Wordsworth : 'Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle.'

two lines of the same ending, and supposed that by taking advantage of this to preserve the exact grammatical meaning of his author, he was indisputably approximating to a good translation. 'Whether,' he writes, 'a translation of Homer may be best executed in blank verse or in rhyme is a question in the decision of which no man [can] find difficulty, who has ever duly considered what translation ought to be, or who is in any degree practically acquainted with those [very different] kinds of versification. . . . No human ingenuity can be equal to the task of closing every couplet with sounds homotonous, expressing at the same time the full sense, and only the full sense, of the original.' [1] And if the true object of translation were to save the labour and dictionaries of construing school-boys, there is no question but this slavish adherence to the original would be the most likely to gain the approbation of those diminutive but sure judges. But if the object is to convey an idea of the general tone, scope, and artistic effect of the original, the mechanical copying of the details is as likely to end in a good result as a careful cast from a dead man's features to produce a living and speaking being. On the whole, therefore, the condemnation remains, that Homer is not dull, and Cowper is.

With the translation of Homer terminated all the brightest period of Cowper's life. There is little else to say. He undertook an edition of Milton— a most difficult task, involving the greatest and most accurate learning in theology, in classics, in Italian—in a word, in all ante-Miltonic literature. By far the greater portion of this lay quite out of Cowper's path. He had never been a hard student, and his evident incapacity for the task troubled and vexed him. A

[1] Cowper's Preface to his translation of Homer's *Iliad*.

man who had never been able to assume any real responsibility was not likely to feel comfortable under the weight of a task which very few men would be able to accomplish. Mrs. Unwin too fell into a state of helplessness and despondency; and instead of relying on her for cheerfulness and management, he was obliged to manage for her, and cheer her. His mind was unequal to the task.

Gradually the dark cloud of melancholy, which had hung about him so long, grew and grew, and extended itself day by day. In vain Lord Thurlow, who was a likely man to know, assured him that his spiritual despondency was without ground; he smiled sadly, but seemed to think that at any rate he was not going into Chancery. In vain Hayley, a rival poet, but a good-natured, blundering, well-intentioned, incoherent man, went to and fro, getting the Lord Chief Justice and other dignitaries to attest, under their hands, that they concurred in Thurlow's opinion. In vain, with far wiser kindness, his relatives, especially many of his mother's family, from whom he had been long divided, but who gradually drew nearer to him as they were wanted, endeavoured to divert his mind to healthful labour and tranquil society. The day of these things had passed away—the summer was ended. He became quite unequal to original composition, and his greatest pleasure was hearing his own writings read to him. After a long period of hopeless despondency he died on 25th April, in the first year of this century; and if he needs an epitaph, let us say, that not in vain was he Nature's favourite. As a higher poet sings,—

> 'And all day long I number yet,
> All seasons through, another debt,
> Which I, wherever thou art met,
> To thee am owing;

An instinct call it, a blind sense ;
A happy, genial influence,
Coming one knows not how, nor whence,
Nor whither going.
. . . . . .
' If stately passions in me burn,
And one chance look to Thee should turn,
I drink out of an humbler urn
A lowlier pleasure ;
The homely sympathy that heeds
The common life, our nature breeds ;
A wisdom fitted to the needs
Of hearts at leisure.' [1]

[1] Wordsworth : ' To the Daisy ' (1802), st. 9 and 7.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.[1]

AFTER the long biography of Moore, it is half a comfort to think of a poet as to whom our information is but scanty. The few intimates of Shelley seem inclined to go to their graves without telling in accurate detail the curious circumstances of his life. We are left to be content with vain 'prefaces' and the circumstantial details of a remarkable blunderer. We know something, however;—we know enough to check our inferences from his writings; in some moods it is pleasant not to have them disturbed by long volumes of memoirs and anecdotes.

One peculiarity of Shelley's writing makes it natural that at times we should not care to have, that at times we should wish for, a full biography. No writer has left so clear an image of himself in his writings; when we remember them as a whole, we seem to want no more. No writer, on the other hand, has left so many little allusions which we should be glad to have explained, which the patient patriarch would not perhaps have endured that any one should comprehend while he did not. The reason is that Shelley has combined the use of the

[1] *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley.* Edited by Mrs. Shelley. 1853.
Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations, and Fragments. By Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by Mrs. Shelley. 1854.
The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley. By Captain Thomas Medwin. 1847.

two great modes by which writers leave with their readers the image of themselves.

There is the art of self-delineation. Some authors try in imagination to get outside themselves—to contemplate their character as a fact, and to describe it and the movement of their own actions as external forms and images. Scarcely any one has done this as often as Shelley. There is hardly one of his longer works which does not contain a finished picture of himself in some point or under some circumstances. Again, some writers, almost or quite unconsciously, by a special instinct of style, give an idea of themselves. This is not peculiar to literary men ; it is quite as remarkable among men of action. There are people in the world who cannot write the commonest letter on the commonest affair of business without giving a just idea of themselves. The Duke of Wellington is an example which at once occurs of this. You may read a despatch of his about bullocks and horseshoe-nails, and yet you will feel an interest—a great interest, because somehow among the words seems to lurk the mind of a great general. Shelley has this peculiarity also. Every line of his has a personal impress, an unconscious inimitable manner. And the two modes in which he gives an idea of himself concur. In every delineation we see the same simple intense being. As mythology found a Naiad in the course of every liquid [?limpid] stream, so through each eager line our fancy sees the same panting image of sculptured purity.

Shelley is probably the most remarkable instance of the pure impulsive character,—to comprehend which requires a little detail. Some men are born under the law ; their whole life is a continued struggle between the lower principles of their nature and the higher. These are what are called men of principle ;

each of their best actions is a distinct choice between conflicting motives. One propension would bear them here ; another there ; a third would hold them still : into the midst the living will goes forth in its power, and selects whichever it holds to be best. The habitual supremacy of conscience in such men gives them an idea that they only exert their will when they do right ; when they do wrong they seem to 'let their nature go ;' they say that 'they are hurried away :' but, in fact, there is commonly an act of will in both cases ;—only it is weaker when they act ill, because in passably good men, if the better principles are reasonably strong, they conquer ; it is only when very faint that they are vanquished. Yet the case is evidently not always so ; sometimes the wrong principle is of itself and of set purpose definitely chosen : the better one is consciously put down. The very existence of divided natures is a conflict. This is no new description of human nature. For eighteen hundred years Christendom has been amazed at the description in St. Paul of the law of his members warring against the law of his mind. Expressions most unlike in language, but not dissimilar in meaning, are to be found in some of the most familiar passages of Aristotle.

In extreme contrast to this is the nature which has no struggle. It is possible to conceive a character in which but one impulse is ever felt—in which the whole being, as with a single breeze, is carried in a single direction. The only exercise of the will in such a being is in aiding and carrying out the dictates of the single propensity. And this is something. There are many of our powers and faculties only in a subordinate degree under the control of the emotions ; the intellect itself in many moments requires to be bent to defined attention by com-

pulsion of the will; no mere intensity of desire will thrust it on its tasks. But of what in most men is the characteristic action of the will—namely, self-control—such natures are hardly in want. An ultimate case could be imagined in which they would not need it at all. They have no lower desires to pull down, for they have no higher ones which come into collision with them; the very words 'lower' and 'higher,' involving the contemporaneous action and collision of two impulses, are inapplicable to them; there is no strife; all their souls impel them in a single line. This may be a quality of the highest character: indeed, in the highest character it will certainly be found; no one will question that the whole nature of the holiest being tends to what is holy without let, struggle, or strife—it would be impiety to doubt it. Yet this same quality may certainly be found in a lower—a much lower—mind than the highest.

A level may be of any elevation; the absence of intestine commotion may arise from a sluggish dullness to eager aspirations; the one impulse which is felt may be any impulse whatever. If the idea were completely exemplified, one would instinctively say that a being with so single a mind could hardly belong to human nature. Temptation is the mark of our life; we can hardly divest ourselves of the idea that it is indivisible from our character. As it was said of solitude, so it may be said of the sole dominion of a single impulse: 'Whoso is devoted to it would seem to be either a beast or a god.' [1]

[1] 'Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god,'—Bacon's rendering (*Essays*: 'Of Friendship') of a passage in Aristotle's *Politics* (Bk. 1. chap. 2), which is literally translated as follows: 'If an individual is not in himself sufficient to compose a perfect government, he is to a city as other parts are to a whole: but he that is incapable of society, or so complete in

Completely realised on earth this idea will never be; but approximations may be found, and one of the closest of those approximations is Shelley. We fancy his mind placed in the light of thought, with pure subtle fancies playing to and fro. On a sudden an impulse arises; it is alone, and has nothing to contend with; it cramps the intellect, pushes aside the fancies, constrains the nature; it *bolts* forward into action. Such a character is an extreme puzzle to external observers. From the occasionality of its impulses it will often seem silly; from their singularity, strange; from their intensity, fanatical. It is absurdest in the more trifling matters. There is a legend of Shelley, during an early visit to London, flying along the street, catching sight of a new microscope, buying it in a moment; pawning it the instant afterwards to relieve some one in the same street in distress. The trait may be exaggerated, but it is characteristic. It shows the sudden irruption of his impulses, their abrupt force and curious purity.

The predominant impulse in Shelley from a very early age was 'a passion for reforming mankind.' Mr. [Francis] Newman has told us in his *Letters from the East* how much he and his half-missionary associates were annoyed at being called 'young people trying to convert the world.' In a strange land, ignorant of the language, beside a recognised religion, in the midst of an immemorial society, the aim, though in a sense theirs, seemed ridiculous when ascribed to them. Shelley would not have felt this at all. No society, however organised, would have been too strong for him to attack. He would not have paused. The impulse was upon him. He would have been ready to preach that mankind were

himself as not to want it, makes no part of a city as a beast or a god.'

to be 'free, equal, [and] pure, and wise,'[1]—in favour of 'justice, and truth, and time, and the world's natural sphere,'[2]—in the Ottoman Empire, or to the Czar, or to George III. Such truths were independent of time and place and circumstance; some time or other, something, or somebody (his faith was a little vague) would most certainly intervene to establish them. It was this placid undoubting confidence which irritated the positive and sceptical mind of Hazlitt. 'The author of the "Prometheus Unbound,"' he tells us,[3] 'has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. He is sanguine-complexioned and shrill-voiced. As is often observable in the case of religious enthusiasts, there is a slenderness of constitutional *stamina*, which renders the flesh no match for the spirit. His bending, flexible form appears to take no strong hold of things, does not grapple with the world about him, but slides from it like a river—

> "And in its liquid texture mortal wound
> Receives no more than can the fluid air."

The shock of accident, the weight of authority, make no impression on his opinions, which retire like a feather, or rise from the encounter unhurt, through their own buoyancy. He is clogged by no dull system of realities, no earth-bound feelings, no rooted prejudices, by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit; but is drawn up by irresistible levity to the regions of mere speculation and fancy, to the sphere of air and fire, where his delighted spirit floats in "seas of pearl and clouds of

[1] *Laon and Cythna* (or *Revolt of Islam*), canto vii, stanza xxxiii.
[2] *Ibid.* stanza xxxi.
[3] *Table Talk*: 'On Paradox and Commonplace.'

amber." There is no *caput mortuum* of worn-out, threadbare experience to serve as ballast to his mind; it is all volatile, intellectual salt-of-tartar, that refuses to combine its evanescent, inflammable essence with anything solid or anything lasting. Bubbles are to him the only realities:—touch them and they vanish. Curiosity is the only proper category of his mind, and though a man in knowledge, he is a child in feeling.' And so on, with vituperation. No two characters could, indeed, be found more opposite than the open, eager, buoyant poet, and the dark, threatening, unbelieving critic.

It is difficult to say how far such a tendency under some circumstances might not have carried Shelley into positions most alien to an essential benevolence. It is most dangerous to be possessed with an idea. Dr. Arnold used to say that he had studied the life of Robespierre with the greatest personal benefit. No personal purity is a protection against insatiable zeal; it almost acts in the opposite direction. The less a man is conscious of inferior motives, the more likely is he to fancy that he is doing God service. There is no difficulty in imagining Shelley cast by the accident of fortune into the Paris of the Revolution; hurried on by its ideas, undoubting in its hopes, wild with its excitement, going forth in the name of freedom conquering and to conquer;—and who can think that he would have been scrupulous how he attained such an end? It was in him to have walked towards it over seas of blood. One could almost identify him with St. Just, 'the fair-haired Republican.'

On another and a more generally interesting topic, Shelley advanced a theory which amounts to a deification of impulse. 'Love,' he tells us, 'is inevitably consequent upon the perception of loveliness.

Love withers under constraint; its very essence is liberty; it is compatible neither with obedience, jealousy, nor fear; it is there most pure, perfect, and unlimited, where its votaries live in confidence, equality, and unreserve. . . . A husband and wife ought to continue united only so long as they love each other. Any law which should bind them to cohabitation for one moment after the decay of their affection would be a most intolerable tyranny, and the most unworthy of toleration. How odious an usurpation of the right of private judgment should that law be considered, which should make the ties of friendship indissoluble, in spite of the caprices, the inconstancy, the fallibility of the human mind! And by so much would the fetters of love be heavier and more unendurable than those of friendship, as love is more vehement and capricious, more dependent on those delicate peculiarities of imagination, and less capable of reduction to the ostensible merits of the object.'

This passage, no doubt, is from an early and crude essay, one of the notes to 'Queen Mab'; and there are many indications, in his latter years, that though he might hold in theory that 'constancy has nothing virtuous in itself,' yet in practice he shrank from breaking a tie hallowed by years of fidelity and sympathy. But, though his conduct was doubtless higher than his creed, there is no evidence that his creed was ever changed. The whole tone of his works is on the other side. The 'Epipsychidion' could not have been written by a man who attached a moral value to constancy of *mind*. And the whole doctrine is most expressive of his character. A quivering sensibility endured only the essence of the most refined love. It is intelligible, that one who bowed in a moment to every desire should have

attached a kind of consecration to the most pure and eager of human passions.

The evidence of Shelley's poems confirms this impression of him. The characters which he delineates have all this same kind of pure impulse. The reforming impulse is especially felt. In almost every one of his works there is some character, of whom all we know is that he or she had this passionate disposition to reform mankind. We know nothing else about them, and they are all the same. Laon in the 'Revolt of Islam' does not differ at all from Lionel in 'Rosalind and Helen.' Laon differs from Cythna in the former poem only as male from female. Lionel is delineated, though not with Shelley's greatest felicity, in a single passage :—

> 'Yet through those dungeon-walls there came
> Thy thrilling light, O liberty!
> And as the meteor's midnight flame
> Startles the dreamer, sunlight truth
> Flashed on his visionary youth,
> And filled him, not with love, but faith,
> And hope, and courage mute in death;
> For love and life in him were twins,
> Born at one birth: in every other
> First life, then love its course begins,
> Though they be children of one mother;
> And so through this dark world they fleet
> Divided, till in death they meet:
> But he loved all things ever. Then
> He passed amid the strife of men,
> And stood at the throne of armèd power
> Pleading for a world of woe:
> Secure as one on a rock-built tower
> O'er the wrecks which the surge trails to and fro.
> 'Mid the passions wild of human-kind
> He stood, like a spirit calming them;
> For, it was said, his words could bind
> Like music the lulled crowd, and stem
> That torrent of unquiet dream
> Which mortals truth and reason deem,
> But is revenge, and fear, and pride.
> Joyous he was; and hope and peace

On all who heard him did abide,
Raining like dew from his sweet talk,
As, where the evening star may walk
Along the brink of the gloomy seas,
Liquid mists of splendour quiver.'

Such is the description of all his reformers in calm. In times of excitement they all burst forth—

'Fear not the tyrants shall rule for ever,
Or the priests of the bloody faith;
They stand on the brink of that mighty river,
Whose waves they have tainted with death;
It is fed from the depths of a thousand dells,
Around them it foams, and rages, and swells,
And their swords and their sceptres I floating see,
Like wrecks in the surge of eternity.' [1]

In his more didactic poems it is the same. All the world is evil, and will be evil, until some unknown conqueror shall appear—a teacher by rhapsody and a conqueror by words—who shall at once reform all evil. Mathematicians place great reliance on the unknown symbol, great X. Shelley did more; he expected it would take life and reform our race. Such impersonations are, of course, nor real men; they are mere incarnations of a desire. Another passion, which no man has ever felt more strongly than Shelley—the desire to penetrate the mysteries of existence (by Hazlitt profanely called curiosity)—is depicted in 'Alastor' as the sole passion of the only person in the poem:—

'By solemn vision, and bright silver dream,
His infancy was nurtured. Every sight
And sound from the vast earth and ambient air
Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
The fountains of divine philosophy
Fled not his thirsting lips; and all of great,
Or good, or lovely, which the sacred past
In truth or fable consecrates, he felt

[1] *Rosalind and Helen*, ll. 615, 895.

> And knew. When early youth had past, he left
> His cold fireside and alienated home
> To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands.
> Many a wide waste and tangled wilderness
> Has lured his fearless steps ; and he has bought
> With his sweet voice and eyes, from savage men,
> His rest and food.'

He is cheered on his way by a beautiful dream, and the search to find it again mingles with the shadowy quest. It is remarkable how great is the superiority of the personification in 'Alastor,' though one of his earliest writings, over the reforming abstractions of his other works. The reason is its far greater closeness to reality. The one is a description of what he was ; the other of what he desired to be. Shelley had nothing of the magic influence, the large insight, the bold strength, the permeating eloquence, which fit a man for a practical reformer : but he had, in perhaps an unequalled and unfortunate measure, the famine of the intellect—the daily insatiable craving after the highest truth which is the passion of 'Alastor.' So completely did he feel it, that the introductory lines of the poem almost seem to identify him with the hero ; at least they express sentiments which would have been exactly dramatic in his mouth :—

> 'Mother of this unfathomable world !
> Favour my solemn song, for I have loved
> Thee ever, and thee only ; I have watched
> Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
> And my heart ever gazes on the depth
> Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed
> In charnels and on coffins, where black death
> Keeps records of the trophies won from thee,
> Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
> Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
> Thy messenger, to render up the tale
> Of what we are. In lone and silent hours,
> When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness,
> Like an inspired and desperate alchymist
> Staking his very life on some dark hope,

Have I mixed awful talk and asking looks
With my most innocent love, until strange tears,
Uniting with those breathless kisses, made
Such magic as compels the charmèd night
To render up thy charge: . . . and though ne'er yet
Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,
Enough from incommunicable dream,
And twilight phantasms, and deep noonday thought
Has shone within me, that serenely now
And moveless as a long-forgotten lyre
Suspended in the solitary dome
Of some mysterious and deserted fane,
I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
May modulate with murmurs of the air,
And motions of the forests and the sea,
And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
Of night and day, and the deep heart of man.'

The accompaniments are fanciful; but the essential passion was his own.

These two forms of abstract personification exhaust all which can be considered characters among Shelley's poems—one poem excepted. Of course, all his works contain 'Spirits,' 'Phantasms,' 'Dream No. 1,' and 'Fairy No. 3;' but these do not belong to this world. The higher air seems never to have been favourable to the production of marked character; with almost all poets the inhabitants of it are prone to a shadowy thinness: in Shelley, the habit of frequenting mountain-tops has reduced them to evanescent mists of lyrical energy.

One poem of Shelley's, however, has two beings of another order; creations which, if not absolutely dramatic characters of the first class—not beings whom we know better than we know ourselves—are nevertheless very high specimens of the second; persons who seem like vivid recollections from our intimate experience. In this case the dramatic execution is so good, that it is difficult to say why the results are not quite of the first rank. One

reason of this is, perhaps, their extreme simplicity. Our imaginations, warned by consciousness and outward experience of the wonderful complexity of human nature, refuse to credit the existence of beings, all whose actions are unmodified consequences of a single principle. These two characters are Beatrice Cenci and her father Count Cenci. In most of Shelley's poems—he died under thirty—there is an extreme suspicion of aged persons. In actual life he had plainly encountered many old gentlemen who had no belief in the complete and philosophical reformation of mankind. There is, indeed, an old hermit in the 'Revolt of Islam' who is praised (Captain Medwin identifies him with a Dr. Someone who was kind to Shelley at Eton); but in general the old persons in his poems are persons whose authority it is desirable to disprove :—

> 'Old age, with its grey hair,
> And wrinkled legends of unworthy things,
> And icy sneers, is nought.' [1]

The less its influence, he evidently believes, the better. Not unnaturally, therefore, he selected for a tragedy a horrible subject from Italian story, in which an old man, accomplished in this world's learning, renowned for the 'cynic sneer of o'er experienced sin,' is the principal evil agent. The character of Count Cenci is that of a man who of set principle does evil for evil's sake. He loves 'the sight of agony :'

> 'All men delight in sensual luxury,
> All men enjoy revenge ; and most exult
> Over the tortures they can never feel—
> Flattering their secret peace with others' pain.
> But I delight in nothing else.'

[1] *Revolt of Islam*, canto ii, stanza xxxiii.

If he regrets his age, it is from the failing ability to do evil :—

> 'True, I was happier than I am while yet
> Manhood remained to act the thing I thought ;
> While lust was sweeter than revenge ; and now
> Invention palls.'

It is this that makes him contemplate the violation of his daughter :—

> 'There yet remains a deed to act,
> Whose horror might make sharp an appetite
> More dull than mine.' [1]

Shelley, though an habitual student of Plato—the greatest modern writer who has taken great pleasure in his writings—never seems to have read any treatise of Aristotle ; otherwise he would certainly seem to have derived from that great writer the idea of the ἀκόλαστος ; yet in reality the idea is as natural to Shelley as any man—more likely to occur to him than to most. Children think that everybody who is bad is very bad. Their simple eager disposition only understands the doing what they wish to do ; they do not refine : if they hear of a man doing evil, they think he wishes to do it,—that he has a special impulse to do evil, as they have to do what they do. Something like this was the case with Shelley. His mind, impulsive and childlike, could not imagine the struggling kind of character—either those which struggle with their lower nature and conquer, or those which struggle and are vanquished—either the ἐγκρατής or the ἀκρατής of the old thinker ; but he could comprehend that which is in reality far worse than either, the being who wishes to commit sin because it is sin, who is as it were possessed with a

[1] *Cenci* : I. i. 76, 96, 100.

demon hurrying him on, hot and passionate, to vice and crime.

The innocent child is whirled away by one impulse; the passionate reformer by another; the essential criminal, if such a being be possible, by a third. They are all beings, according to one division, of the same class. An imaginative mind like Shelley's, belonging to the second of these types, naturally is prone in some moods to embody itself under the forms of the third. It is, as it were, the antithesis to itself.—Equally simple is the other character — that of Beatrice. Even before her violation, by a graphic touch of art, she is described as absorbed, or beginning to be absorbed, in the consciousness of her wrongs.

> '*Beatrice.* As I have said, speak to me not of love.
> Had you a dispensation, I have not;
> Nor will I leave this home of misery
> Whilst my poor Bernard, and that gentle lady
> To whom I owe life, and these virtuous thoughts,
> Must suffer what I still have strength to share.
> Alas, Orsino! all the love that once
> I felt for you is turned to bitter pain.
> Ours was a youthful contract, which you first
> Broke, by assuming vows no Pope will loose.
> And yet[1] I love you still, but holily,
> Even as a sister or a spirit might:
> And so I swear a cold fidelity.'[2]

After her violation, her whole being is absorbed by one thought,—how and by what subtle vengeance she can expiate the memory of her shame. These are all the characters in Shelley; an impulsive unity is of the essence of them all.

The same characteristic of Shelley's temperament produced also most marked effects on his speculative opinions. The peculiarity of his creed early brought him into opposition to the world. His education

[1] 'thus.'

[2] *Cenci*: I. ii. 14.

seems to have been principally directed by his father, of whom the only description which has reached us is not favourable. Sir Timothy Shelley, according to Captain Medwin, was an illiterate country gentleman of an extinct race; he had been at Oxford, where he learned nothing, had made the grand tour, from which he brought back 'a smattering of bad French and a bad picture of an eruption at Vesuvius.' He had the air of the old school, and the habit of throwing it off which distinguished that school. Lord Chesterfield himself was not easier on matters of morality. He used to tell his son that he would provide for natural children *ad infinitum*, but would never forgive his making a *mésalliance*. On religion his opinions were very lax. He, indeed, 'required his servants,' we are told, 'to attend Church,' and even on rare occasions, with superhuman virtue, attended himself; but there, as with others of that generation, his religion ended. He doubtless did not feel that any more could be required of him. He was not consciously insincere; but he did not in the least realise the opposition between the religion which he professed and the conduct which he pursued. Such a person was not likely to influence a morbidly sincere imaginative nature in favour of the doctrines of the Church of England.

Shelley went from Eton, where he had been singular, to Oxford, where he was more so. He was a fair classical scholar. But his real mind was given to out-of-school knowledge. He had written a novel; he had studied chemistry; when pressed in argument, he used to ask: 'What, then, does Condorcet say upon the subject?' This was not exactly the youth for the University of Oxford in the year 1810. A distinguished pupil of that University once observed to us: 'The use of the University

of Oxford is, that no one can over-read himself there. The appetite for knowledge is repressed. A blight is thrown over the ingenuous mind,' etc. And possibly it may be so ; considering how small a space literary knowledge fills in the busy English world, it may not be without its advantages that any mind prone to bookish enthusiasm should be taught by the dryness of its appointed studies, the want of sympathy of its teachers, and a rough contact with average English youth, that studious enthusiasm must be its own reward ; that in this country it will meet with little other ; that it will not be encouraged in high places. Such discipline may, however, be carried too far. A very enthusiastic mind may possibly by it be turned in upon itself. This was the case with Shelley.

When he first came up to Oxford, physics were his favourite pursuit. On chemistry, especially, he used to be eloquent. 'The galvanic battery,' said he, 'is a new engine. It has been used hitherto to an insignificant extent : yet it has worked wonders already. What will not an extraordinary combination of troughs of colossal magnitude, a well-arranged system of hundreds of metallic plates, effect ?' Nature, however, like the world, discourages a wild enthusiasm. 'His chemical operations seemed to an unskilful observer to promise nothing but disasters. He had blown himself up at Eton. He had inadvertently swallowed some mineral poison, which he declared had seriously injured his health, and from the effects of which he should never recover. His hands, his clothes, his books, and his furniture, were stained and covered by medical acids,' and so on. Disgusted with these and other failures, he abandoned physics for metaphysics. He rushed headlong into the form of philosophy

then popular. It is not likely that he ever read Locke; and it is easy to imagine the dismay with which the philosopher would have regarded so 'heady and skittish' a disciple: but he continually invoked Locke as an authority, and was really guided by the French expositions of him then popular. Hume, of course, was not without his influence.

With such teachers only to control him, an excitable poet rushed in a moment to materialism, and thence to atheism. Deriving any instruction from the University was, according to him, absurd; he wished to convert the University. He issued a kind of thesis, stating by way of interrogatory all the difficulties of the subject; called it the 'necessity of atheism,' and sent it to the professors, heads of houses, and several bishops. The theistic belief of his college was equal to the occasion. 'It was a fine spring morning on Lady Day in the year 1811, when,' says a fellow-student, 'I went to Shelley's rooms. He was absent; but before I had collected our books, he rushed in. He was terribly agitated. I anxiously inquired what had happened. "I am expelled." He then explained that he had been summoned before the Master and some of the Fellows; that as he was unable to deny the authorship of the essay, he had been expelled, and ordered to quit the college the next morning at latest.' He had wished to be put on his trial more regularly, and stated to the Master that England was a 'free country;' but without effect. He was obliged to leave Oxford: his father was very angry; 'if he had broken the Master's windows, one could have understood it:' but to be expelled for publishing a *book* seemed an error incorrigible, because incomprehensible.

These details at once illustrate Shelley's temperament, and enable us to show that the peculiarity of

his opinions arose out of that temperament. He was placed in circumstances which left his eager mind quite free. Of his father we have already spoken : there was no one else to exercise a subdued or guiding influence over him ; nor would his mind have naturally been one extremely easy to influence. Through life he followed very much his own bent and his own thoughts. His most intimate associates exercised little control over his belief. He followed his nature ; and that nature was in a singular degree destitute of certain elements which most naturally guide ordinary men.

It seems most likely that a person prone to isolated impulse will be defective in the sensation of conscience. There is scarcely room for it. When, as in common conflicting characters, the whole nature is daily and hourly in a perpetual struggle, the faculty which decides what elements in that nature are to have the supremacy is daily and hourly appealed to. Passions are contending ; life is a discipline ; there is a reference every moment to the directory of the discipline—the order-book of the passions. In temperaments not exposed to the ordinary struggle there is no such necessity. Their impulse guides them ; they have little temptation ; are scarcely under the law ; have hardly occasion to consult the statute-book. In consequence, simple and beautiful as such minds often are, they are deficient in the sensation of duty ; have no haunting idea of right or wrong ; show an easy *abandon* in place of a severe self-scrutiny. At first it might seem that such minds lose little ; they are exempted from the consciousness of a code to whose provisions they need little access. But such would be the conclusion only from a superficial view of human nature.

The whole of our inmost faith is a series of

intuitions; and experience seems to show that the intuitions of conscience are the beginning of that series. Childhood has little which can be called a religion; the shows of this world, the play of its lights and shadows, suffice. It is in the collision of our nature, which occurs in youth, that the first real sensation of faith is felt. Conscience is often then morbidly acute; a flush passes over the youthful mind; the guiding instinct is keen and strong, like the passions with which it contends. At the first struggle of our nature commences our religion. Childhood will utter the words; in early manhood, when we become half unwilling to utter them, they begin to have a meaning. The result of history is similar. The whole of religion rests on a faith that the universe is solely ruled by an almighty and all-perfect Being. This strengthens with the moral cultivation, and grows with the improvement of mankind. It is the assumed axiom of the creed of Christendom; and all that is really highest in our race may have the degree of its excellence tested by the degree of the belief in it. But experience shows that the belief only grows very gradually.

We see at various times, and now, vast outlying nations in whom the conviction of morality—the consciousness of a law—is but weak; and there the belief in an all-perfect God is half-forgotten, faint, and meagre. It exists as something between a tradition and a speculation; but it does not come forth on the solid earth; it has no place in the 'business and bosoms'[1] of men; it is thrust out of view even when we look upwards by fancied idols and dreams of the stars in their courses.

Consider the state of the Jewish, as compared with the better part of the pagan world of old. On

[1] Bacon: Dedication to *Essays*.

the one side we see civilisation, commerce, the arts, a great excellence in all the exterior of man's life; a sort of morality sound and sensible, placing the good of man in a balanced moderation within and good looks without;—in a combination of considerate good sense, with the *air* of aristocratic, or, as it was said, 'godlike' refinement. We see, in a word, civilisation, and the ethics of civilisation; the first polished, the other elaborated and perfected. But this is all; we do not see faith. We see in some quarters rather a horror of the *curiosus deus* interfering, controlling, watching—never letting things alone—disturbing the quiet of the world with punishment and the fear of punishment.

The Jewish side of the picture is different. We see a people who have perhaps an inaptitude for independent civilisation, who in secular pursuits have only been assistants and attendants on other nations during the whole history of mankind. These have no equable, beautiful morality like the others; but instead a gnawing, abiding, depressing—one might say, a slavish—ceremonial, excessive sense of law and duty. This nation has faith. By a link not logical, but ethical, this intense, eating, abiding, supremacy of conscience is connected with a deep daily sense of a watchful, governing, and jealous God. And from the people of the law arises the gospel. The sense of duty, when awakened, awakens not only the religion of the law, but in the end the other religious intuitions which lie round about it. The faith of Christendom has arisen not from a great people, but from 'the least of all people,' —from the people whose anxious legalism was a noted contrast to the easy, impulsive life of pagan nations. In modern language, conscience is the *converting* intuition,—that which turns men from

the world without to that within,—from the things which are seen to the realities which are not seen. In a character like Shelley's, where this haunting, abiding, oppressive moral feeling is wanting or defective, the religious belief in an Almighty God which springs out of it is likely to be defective likewise.

In Shelley's case this deficiency was aggravated by what may be called the abstract character of his intellect. We have shown that no character except his own, and characters most strictly allied to his own, are delineated in his works. The tendency of his mind was rather to personify isolated qualities or impulses—equality, liberty, revenge, and so on —than to create out of separate parts or passions the single conception of an entire character. This is, properly speaking, the mythological tendency. All early nations show this marked disposition to conceive of separate forces and qualities as a kind of semi-persons; that is, not true actual persons with distinct characters, but beings who guide certain influences, and of whom all we know is that they guide those influences. Shelley evinces a remarkable tendency to deal with mythology in this simple and elementary form. Other poets have breathed into mythology a modern life; have been attracted by those parts which seem to have a religious meaning, and have enlarged that meaning while studying to embody it. With Shelley it is otherwise; the parts of mythology by which he is attracted are the bare parts—the simple stories which Dr. Johnson found so tedious :—

> 'Arethusa arose
> From her couch of snows
> In the Acroceraunian mountains,—
> From cloud and from crag,
> With many a jag,
> Shepherding her bright fountains.

She leapt down the rocks
With her rainbow locks
Streaming among the streams;—
Her steps paved with green
The downward ravine,
Which slopes to the western gleams:
And gliding and springing
She went, ever singing,
In murmurs as soft as sleep;
The Earth seemed to love her,
And Heaven smiled above her,
As she lingered towards the deep.

Then Alpheus bold,
On his glacier cold,
With his trident the mountains strook,'
Etc., etc.[1]

Arethusa and Alpheus are not characters: they are only the spirits of the fountain and the stream. When not writing on topics connected with ancient mythology, Shelley shows the same bent. 'The Cloud' and 'The Skylark' are more like mythology —have more of the impulse by which the populace, if we may so say, of the external world was first fancied into existence—than any other modern poems. There is, indeed, no habit of mind more remote from our solid and matter-of-fact existence; none which was once powerful, of which the present traces are so rare. In truth, Shelley's imagination achieved all it could with the materials before it.

The materials for the creative faculty must be provided by the receptive faculty. Before a man can imagine what will seem to be realities, he must be familiar with what are realities. The memory of Shelley had no heaped-up 'store of life,' no vast accumulation of familiar characters. His intellect did not tend to the strong grasp of realities; its taste was rather for the subtle refining of theories,

[1] 'Arethusa.' (1820.)

the distilling of exquisite abstractions. His imagination personified what his understanding presented to it. It had nothing else to do. He displayed the same tendency of mind—sometimes negatively and sometimes positively—in his professedly religious inquiries. His belief went through three stages—first, materialism, then a sort of Nihilism, then a sort of Platonism. In neither of them is the rule of the universe ascribed to a character : in the first and last it is ascribed to animated abstractions ; in the second there is no universe at all. In neither of them is there any strong grasp of fact. The writings of the first period are clearly influenced by, and modelled on, Lucretius. He held the same abstract theory of nature — sometimes of half-personified atoms, moving hither and hither of themselves—at other times of a general pervading spirit of nature, holding the same relation to nature, as a visible object, that Arethusa the goddess bears to Arethusa the stream :—

' The magic car moved on.
As they approached their goal
The coursers seemed to gather speed ;
The sea no longer was distinguished ; earth
Appeared a vast and shadowy sphere ;
The sun's unclouded orb
Rolled through the black concave ;
Its rays of rapid light
Parted around the chariot's swifter course,
And fell, like ocean's feathery spray
Dashed from the boiling surge
Before a vessel's prow.

' The magic car moved on.
Earth's distant orb appeared
The smallest light that twinkles in the heaven ;
Whilst round the chariot's way
Innumerable systems rolled,
And countless spheres diffused
An ever-varying glory.

It was a sight of wonder: some
Were horned like the crescent moon;
Some shed a mild and silver beam
Like Hesperus o'er the western sea;
Some dash'd athwart with trains of flame,
Like worlds to death and ruin driven;
Some shone like suns,[1] and as the chariot passed,
Bedimmed [2] all other light.

'Spirit of Nature! here!
In this interminable wilderness
Of worlds, at whose immensity
Even soaring fancy staggers,
Here is thy fitting temple.
Yet not the lightest leaf
That quivers to the passing breeze
Is less instinct with thee:
Yet not the meanest worm
That lurks in graves and fattens on the dead
Less shares thy eternal breath.
Spirit of Nature! thou,
Imperishable as this [glorious] scene,—
Here is thy fitting temple.' [3]

And he copied not only the opinions of Lucretius, but also his tone. Nothing is more remarkable than that two poets of the first rank should have felt a bounding joy in the possession of opinions which, if true, ought, one would think, to move an excitable nature to the keenest and deepest melancholy. That this life is all, that there is no God, but only atoms and a moulding breath, are singular doctrines to be accepted with joy: they only could have been so accepted by wild minds bursting with imperious energy, knowing of no law, 'wreaking thoughts upon expression' of which they knew neither the meaning nor the result.

From this stage Shelley's mind passed to another; but not immediately to one of greater belief. On the contrary, it was the doctrine of Hume which was called in to expel the doctrine of Epicurus.

[1] 'stars.' [2] 'Eclipsed.' [3] *Queen Mab*, I. 237.

His previous teachers had taught him that there was nothing except matter: the Scots sceptic met him at that point with the question—Is matter certain? Hume, as is well known, adopted the negative part from the theory of materialism and the theory of immaterialism, but rejected the positive side of both. He held, or professed to hold, that there was no substantial thing, either matter or mind; but only 'sensations and impressions' flying about the universe, inhering in nothing and going nowhere. These, he said, were the only subjects of consciousness; all you felt was your feeling, and all your thought was your thought; the rest was only hypothesis. The notion that there was any '*you*' at all was a theory generally current among mankind, but not, unless proved, to be accepted by the philosopher.

This doctrine, though little agreeable to the world in general, has an excellence in the eyes of youthful disputants; it is a doctrine which no one will admit, and which no one can disprove. Shelley accordingly accepted it; indeed, it was a better description of his universe than of most people's; his mind was filled with a swarm of ideas, fancies, thoughts, streaming on without his volition, without plan or order. He might be pardoned for fancying that they were all; he could not see the outward world for them; their giddy passage occupied him till he forgot himself.

He has put down the theory in its barest form: 'The most refined abstractions of logic conduct to a view of life, which, though startling to the apprehension, is, in fact, that which the habitual sense of its repeated combinations has extinguished in us. It strips, as it were, the painted curtain from this scene of things. I confess that I am one of

those who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived.' [1] And again: 'The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy is that of unity. Nothing exists but as it is perceived. The difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects. Pursuing the same thread of reasoning, the existence of distinct individual minds, similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion. The words, *I*, *you*, *they*, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to donote the different modifications of the one mind. Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption that I, the person who now write and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it. The words *I*, and *you*, and *they* are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement, and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them. It is difficult to find terms adequate to express so subtle a conception as that to which the Intellectual Philosophy has conducted us. We are on that verge where words abandon us; and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of how little we know.' [2]

On his wild nerves these speculations produced a great effect. Their thin acuteness excited his intellect; their blank result appalled his imagination. He was obliged to pause in the last fragment of one of his metaphysical papers, 'dizzy from

[1] *Essays*: 'On Life.' [2] *Ibid.*

thrilling horror.' In this state of mind he began to study Plato; and it is probable that in the whole library of philosophy there is no writer so suitable to such a reader. A common modern author, believing in mind and matter, he would have put aside at once as loose and popular. He was attracted by a writer who, like himself, in some sense did not believe in either—who supplied him with subtle realities different from either, at once to be extracted by his intellect and to be glorified by his imagination. The theory of Plato, that the all-apparent phenomena were unreal, he believed already; he had a craving to believe in something noble, beautiful, and difficult to understand; he was ready, therefore, to accept the rest of that theory, and to believe that these passing phenomena were imperfect types and resemblances—imperfect incarnations, so to speak — of certain immovable, eternal, archetypal realities. All his later writings are coloured by that theory, though in some passages the remains of the philosophy of the senses with which he commenced appear in odd proximity to the philosophy of abstractions with which he concluded.

There is, perhaps, no allusion in Shelley to the *Phædrus*; but no one can doubt which of Plato's ideas would be most attractive to the nature we have described. The most valuable part of Plato he did not comprehend. There is in Shelley none of that unceasing reference to ethical consciousness and ethical religion which has for centuries placed Plato first among the preparatory preceptors of Christianity. The general doctrine is that—

> 'The One remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly;

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments.' [1]

The particular worship of the poet is paid to that one spirit whose—

> ' Plastic stress
> Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
> All new successions to the forms they wear ;
> Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
> To its own likeness, as each mass may bear ;
> And bursting in its beauty and its might
> From trees, and beasts, and men, into the Heavens' light.' [2]

It is evident that not even in this, the highest form of creed to which he ever clearly attained, is there any such distinct conception of a character as is essential to a real religion. The conception of God is not to be framed out of a single attribute. Shelley has changed the ' idea ' of beauty into a spirit, and this probably for the purposes of poetry ; he has given it life and animal motion ; but he has done no more ; the ' spirit ' has no will, and no virtue : it is animated, but unholy ; alive, but unmoral : it is an object of intense admiration ; it is not an object of worship.

We have ascribed this quality of Shelley's writings to an abstract intellect ; and in part, no doubt, correctly. Shelley had, probably by nature, such an intellect ; it was self-enclosed, self-absorbed, teeming with singular ideas, remote from character and life ; but so involved is human nature, that this tendency to abstraction, which we have spoken of as aggravating the consequences of his simple impulsive temperament, was itself aggravated by that temperament.

It is a received opinion in metaphysics, that the idea of personality is identical with the idea of will.

[1] ' Adonais,' stanza lii. [2] *Ibid.* stanza xliii.

A distinguished French writer has accurately expressed this: 'Le pouvoir,' says M. Jouffroy, 'que l'homme a de s'emparer de ses capacités naturelles et de les diriger fait de lui une *personne*; et c'est parce que les *choses* n'exercent pas ce pouvoir en elles-mêmes, qu'elles ne sont que des choses. Telle est la véritable différence qui distingue les choses des personnes. Toutes les natures possibles sont douées de certaines capacités; mais les unes ont reçu par-dessus les autres le privilége de se saisir d'elles-mêmes et de se gouverner: celles-là sont les personnes. Les autres en ont été privées, en sorte qu'elles n'ont point de part à ce qui se fait en elles: celles-là sont les choses. Leurs capacités ne s'en développent pas moins, mais c'est exclusivement selon les lois auxquelles Dieu les a soumises. C'est Dieu qui gouverne en elles; il est la personne des choses, comme l'ouvrier est la personne de la montre. Ici la personne est hors de l'être; dans le sein même des choses, comme dans le sein de la montre, la personne ne se rencontre pas; on ne trouve qu'une série de capacités qui se meuvent aveuglément, sans que le nature qui en est douée sache même ce qu'elles font. Aussi ne peut-on demander compte aux choses de ce qui se fait en elles; il faut s'addresser à Dieu: comme on s'adresse à l'ouvrier et non à la montre, quand la montre va mal.'

And if this theory be true—and doubtless it is an approximation to the truth—it is evident that a mind ordinarily moved by simple impulse will have little distinct consciousness of personality. While thrust forward by such impulse, it is a mere instrument. Outward things set it in motion. It goes where they bid; it exerts no will upon them; it is, to speak expressively, a mere conducting thing. When such a mind is free from such impulse, there

is even less will; thoughts, feelings, ideas, emotions, pass before it in a sort of dream. For the time it is a mere perceiving thing. In neither case is there a trace of voluntary character. If we want a reason for anything, 'il faut s'adresser à Dieu.'

Shelley's political opinions were likewise the effervescence of his peculiar nature. The love of liberty is peculiarly natural to the simple impulsive mind. It feels irritated at the idea of a law; it fancies it does not need it; it really needs it less than other men [? minds]. Government seems absurd —society an incubus. It has hardly patience to estimate particular institutions; it wants to begin again—to make a *tabula rasa* of all which men have created or devised; for they seem to have been constructed on a false system, for an object it does not understand. On this *tabula rasa* Shelley's abstract imagination proceeded to set up arbitrary monstrosities of 'equality' and 'love,' which never will be realised among the children of men.

Such a mind is clearly driven to self-delineation. Nature, no doubt, in some sense remains to it. A dreamy mind—a mind occupied intensely with its own thoughts—will often have a peculiarly intense apprehension of anything which by the hard collision of the world it has been forced to observe. The scene stands out alone in the memory; is a refreshment from hot thoughts; grows with the distance of years. A mind like Shelley's, deeply susceptible to all things beautiful, has many pictures and images shining in its recollection which it recurs to, and which it is ever striving to delineate. Indeed, in such minds it is rather the picture in their mind which they describe than the original object; the 'ideation,' as some harsh metaphysicians call it, rather than the reality. A certain dream-light is

diffused over it; a wavering touch, as of interfering fancy or fading recollection. The landscape has not the hues of the real world; it is modified in the *camera obscura* of the self-enclosed intelligence. Nor can such a mind long endure the cold process of external delineation. Its own hot thoughts rush in; its favourite topic is itself and them. Shelley, indeed, as we observed before, carries this to an extent which no poet probably ever equalled. He described not only his character but his circumstances. We know that this is so in a large number of passages; if his poems were commented on by some one thoroughly familiar with the events of his life, we should doubtless find that it was so in many more. On one strange and painful scene his fancy was continually dwelling. In a gentle moment we have a dirge:—

'The warm sun is failing, the bleak wind is wailing,
The bare boughs are sighing, the pale flowers are dying,
And the year
On the earth her deathbed, in a shroud of leaves, dead
Is lying.
Come months, come away,
From November to May,
In your saddest array;
Follow the bier
Of the dead cold year,
And like dim shadows watch by her sepulchre.

'The chill rain is falling, the nipt worm is crawling,
The rivers are swelling, the thunder is knelling
For the year;
The blithe swallows are flown, and the lizards each gone
To his dwelling.
Come months, come away;
Put on white, black, and grey;
Let your light sisters play—
Ye, follow the bier
Of the dead cold year,
And make her grave green with tear on tear.'[1]

[1] 'Autumn: a Dirge.'

In a frenzied mood he breaks forth into wildness :—

> ' She is still, she is cold
> On the bridal couch ;
> One step to the white death-bed,
> And one to the bier,
> And one to the charnel—and one, O, where ?
> The dark arrow fled
> In the noon.
>
> ' Ere the sun through heaven once more has roll'd,
> The rats in her heart
> Will have made their nest,
> And the worms be alive in her golden hair,
> While the spirit that guides the sun
> Sits throned in his flaming chair,
> She shall sleep.' [1]

There is no doubt that these and a hundred other similar passages allude to the death of his first wife ; as melancholy a story as ever shivered the nerves of an excitable being. The facts are hardly known to us, but they are something like these : In very early youth Shelley had formed a half-fanciful attachment to a cousin, a Miss Harriet Grove, who is said to have been attractive, and to whom, certainly, his fancy often went back in later and distant years. How deep the feeling was on either side we do not know ; she seems to have taken an interest in the hot singular dreams which occupied his mind—except only where her image might intrude—from which one might conjecture that she took unusual interest in him ; she even wrote some chapters, or parts of some, in one of his boyish novels, and her parents doubtless thought the ' Rosicrucian ' could be endured, as Shelley was the heir to land and a baronetcy. His expulsion from Oxford altered all this. Probably he had always among his friends been thought ' a singular young man,' and they

[1] Dirge in ' Ginevra.'

had waited in perplexity to see if the oddness would turn to unusual good or unusual evil. His atheistic treatise and its results seemed to show clearly the latter, and all communication with Miss Grove was instantly forbidden him. What she felt on the subject is not told us; probably some theistic and undreaming lover intervened, for she married in a short time.

The despair of an excitable poet at being deprived of his mistress at the same moment that he was abandoned by his family, and in a measure by society, may be fancied, though it cannot be known. Captain Medwin observes: 'Shelley, on this trying occasion, had the courage to live, in order that he might labour for one great object—the advancement of the human race, and the amelioration of society; and strengthened himself in a resolution to devote his energies to this ultimate end, being prepared to endure every obloquy, to make every sacrifice for its accomplishment: and would,' such is the Captain's English, 'if necessary, have died in the cause.' It does not appear, however, that disappointed love took solely the very unusual form of philanthropy. By chance, whether with or without leave does not appear, he went to see his second sister, who was at school at a place called Balham Hill, near London; and, while walking in the garden with her, 'a Miss Westbrook passed them.' She was a 'handsome blonde young lady, nearly sixteen;' and Shelley was much struck. He found out that her name was 'Harriett,'—as he, after his marriage, anxiously expresses it, with two t's, 'Harriett';—and he fell in love at once. She had the name of his first love: 'fairer, though yet the same.' After his manner, he wrote to her immediately. He was in the habit of doing this to people who interested him, either in his own or

under an assumed name : and once, Captain Medwin says, carried on a long correspondence with Mrs. Hemans, then Miss Brown, under his (the captain's) name ; but which he, the deponent, was not permitted to peruse.

In Miss Westbrook's case the correspondence had a more serious consequence. Of her character we can only guess a little. She was, we think, an ordinary blooming young lady of sixteen. Shelley was an extraordinary young man of nineteen, rather handsome, very animated, and expressing his admiration a little intensely. He was doubtless much the most aristocratic person she had ever spoken to ; for her father was a retired innkeeper, and Shelley had always the air of a man of birth. There is a vision, too, of an elder sister, who made ' Harriett dear ' very uncomfortable. On the whole, the result may be guessed. At the end of August 1811, we do not know the precise day, they were married at Gretna Green. Jests may be made on it ; but it was no laughing matter in the life of the wife or the husband. Of the lady's disposition and mind we know nothing, except from Shelley ; a medium which must, under the circumstances, be thought a distorting one. We should conclude that she was capable of making many people happy, though not of making Shelley happy.

There is an ordinance of nature at which men of genius are perpetually fretting, but which does more good than many laws of the universe which they praise : it is, that ordinary women ordinarily prefer ordinary men. ' Genius,' as Hazlitt would have said, ' puts them out.' It is so strange ; it does not come into the room as usual ; it says ' such things ' ; once it forgot to brush its hair. The common female mind prefers usual tastes, settled

manners, customary conversation, defined and practical pursuits. And it is a great good that it should be so. Nature has no wiser instinct. The average woman suits the average man; good health, easy cheerfulness, common charms, suffice. If Miss Westbrook had married an every-day person—a gentleman, suppose, in the tallow line—she would have been happy, and have made him happy. Her mind could have understood his life; her society would have been a gentle relief from unodoriferous pursuits. She had nothing in common with Shelley. His mind was full of eager thoughts, wild dreams, singular aspirations. The most delicate tact would probably have often failed, the nicest sensibility been jarred, the most entire affection erred, in dealing with such a being. A very peculiar character was required, to enter into such a rare union of curious qualities.

Some eccentric men of genius have, indeed, felt in the habitual tact and serene nothingness of ordinary women, a kind of trust and calm. They have admired an instinct of the world which they had not—a repose of mind they could not share. But this is commonly in later years. A boy of twenty thinks he knows the world; he is too proud and happy in his own eager and shifting thoughts, to wish to contrast them with repose. The commonplaceness of life goads him: placid society irritates him. Bread is an encumbrance; upholstery tedious; he craves excitement; he wishes to reform mankind. You cannot convince him it is right to sow, in a world so full of sorrow and evil. Shelley was in this state; he hurried to and fro over England, pursuing theories, and absorbed in plans. He was deep in metaphysics; had subtle disproofs of all religion; wrote several poems, which would have

been a puzzle to a very clever young lady. There were pecuniary difficulties besides: neither of the families had approved of the match, and neither were inclined to support the household. Altogether, no one can be surprised that in less than three years the hasty union ended in a 'separation by mutual consent.' The wonder is that it lasted so long. What her conduct was, after the separation, is not very clear; there were 'reports' about her at Bath—perhaps a loquacious place. She was not twenty, probably handsome, and not improbably giddy: being quite without evidence, we cannot judge what was rumour and what was truth.

Shelley has not left us in similar doubt. After a year or two he travelled abroad with Mary, afterwards the second Mrs. Shelley, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin—names most celebrated in those times, and even now known for their anti-matrimonial speculations. Of their 'six weeks' tour' abroad, in the year 1816, a record remains, and should be read by any persons who wish to learn what travelling was in its infancy. It was the year when the Continent was first thrown open to English travellers; and few probably adopted such singular means of locomotion as Shelley and his companions. First they tried walking, and had a very small ass to carry their portmanteau; then they tried a mule; then a *fiacre*, which drove away from them; afterwards they came to a raft. It was not, however, an unamusing journey. At an ugly and out-of-the-way chateau, near Brunen, Shelley began a novel, to be called *The Assassins*, which he never finished—probably never continued—after his return; but which still remains, and is one of the most curious and characteristic specimens of his prose style. It

was a refreshing intellectual tour; one of the most pleasant rambles of his life. On his return he was met by painful intelligence. His wife had destroyed herself. Of her state of mind we have again no evidence. She is said to have been deeply affected by the 'reports' to which we have alluded; but whatever it was, Shelley felt himself greatly to blame. He had been instrumental in first dividing her from her family; had connected himself with her in a wild contract, from which neither could ever be set free; if he had not crossed her path, she might have been happy in her own way and in her own sphere.

All this preyed upon his mind, and it is said he became mad; and whether or not his horror and pain went the length of actual frenzy, they doubtless approached that border-line of suffering excitement which divides the most melancholy form of sanity from the most melancholy form of insanity. In several poems he seems to delineate himself in the guise of a maniac:—

'"Of his sad history
I know but this," said Maddalo; "he came
To Venice a dejected man, and fame
Said he was wealthy, or he had been so.
Some thought the loss of fortune wrought him woe;
But he was ever talking in such sort
As you do,—but more sadly: he seem'd hurt,
Even as a man with his peculiar wrong,
To hear but of the oppression of the strong,
Or those absurd deceits (I think with you
In some respects, you know) which carry through
The excellent impostors of this earth
When they outface detection. He had worth,
Poor fellow! but a humourist in his way."—

—"Alas, what drove him mad?"
"I cannot say:
A lady came with him from France; and when
She left him and returned, he wander'd then
About yon lonely isles of desert sand
Till he grew wild. He had no cash nor land

Remaining :—the police had brought him here—
Some fancy took him, and he would not bear
Removal ; so I fitted up for him
Those rooms beside the sea, to please his whim,
And sent him busts, and books, and urns for flowers,
Which had adorned his life in happier hours,
And instruments of music. You may guess,
A stranger could do little more or less
For one so gentle and unfortunate—
And those are his sweet strains, which charm the weight
From madmen's chains, and make this hell appear
A heaven of sacred silence, hushed to hear."
" Nay, this was kind of you,—he had no claim,
As the world says."
" None—but the very same,
Which I on all mankind, were I, as he,
Fall'n to such deep reverse ;—his melody
Is interrupted—now we hear the din
Of madmen, shriek on shriek, again begin ;
Let us now visit him : after this strain
He ever communes with himself again,
And sees and hears not any."
Having said
Those words, we called the keeper : and he led
To an apartment opening on the sea—
There the poor wretch was sitting mournfully
Near a piano, his pale fingers twined
One with the other ; and the ooze and wind
Rushed through an open casement, and did sway
His hair, and started [1] it with the brackish spray :
His head was leaning on a music-book,
And he was muttering ; and his lean limbs shook ;
His lips were pressed against a folded leaf,
In hue too beautiful for health, and grief
Smiled in their motions as they lay apart—
As one who wrought from his own fervid heart
The eloquence of passion, soon he raised
His sad meek face, and eyes lustrous and glazed,
And spoke,—sometimes as one who wrote and thought
His words might move some heart that heeded not,
If sent to distant lands : and then as one
Reproaching deeds never to be undone,
With wondering self-compassion ; then his speech
Was lost in grief, and then his words came each
Unmodulated, cold, expressionless ;
But that from one jarred accent you might guess

[1] starred.

It was despair made them so uniform:
And all the while the loud and gusty storm
Hissed through the window, and we stood behind,
Stealing his accents from the envious wind,
Unseen. I yet remember what he said
Distinctly: such impression his words made.' [1]

And casual illustrations—unconscious metaphors, showing a terrible familiarity—are borrowed from insanity in his subsequent works.

This strange story is in various ways deeply illustrative of his character. It shows how the impulsive temperament, not definitely intending evil, is hurried forward, so to say, *over* actions and crimes which would seem to indicate deep depravity —which would do so in ordinary human nature, but which do not indicate in it anything like the same degree of guilt. Driven by singular passion across a tainted region, it retains no taint; on a sudden it passes through evil, but preserves its purity. So curious is this character that a record of its actions may read like a libel on its life.

To some the story may also suggest whether Shelley's nature was one of those most adapted for love in its highest form. It is impossible to deny that he loved with a great intensity; yet it was with a certain narrowness, and therefore a certain fitfulness. Possibly a somewhat wider nature, taking hold of other characters at more points,—fascinated as intensely, but more variously,—stirred as deeply, but through more complicated emotions,—is requisite for the highest and most lasting feeling. Passion, to be enduring, must be many-sided. Eager and narrow emotions urge like the gadfly of the poet: but they pass away; they are single; there is nothing to revive them. Various as human

[1] 'Julian and Maddalo.'

nature must be the passion which absorbs that nature into itself.

Shelley's mode of delineating women has a corresponding peculiarity. They are well described; but they are described under only one aspect. Every one of his poems almost has a lady whose arms are white, whose mind is sympathising, and whose soul is beautiful. She has many names—Cythna, Asia, Emily;[1] but these are only external disguises; she is indubitably the same person, for her character never varies. No character can be simpler. She is described as the ideal object of love in its most simple and elemental form; the pure object of the essential passion. She is a being to be loved in a single moment, with eager eyes and gasping breath; but you feel that in that moment you have seen the whole. There is nothing to come to afterwards. The fascination is intense, but uniform. There is not the ever-varying grace, the ever-changing expression of the unchanging charm, that alone can attract for all time the shifting moods of a various and mutable nature.

The works of Shelley lie in a confused state, like the *disjecta membra* of the poet of our boyhood. They are in the strictest sense 'remains.' It is absurd to expect from a man who died at thirty a long work of perfected excellence. All which at so early an age can be expected are fine fragments, casual expressions of single inspirations. Of these Shelley has written some that are nearly, and one or two perhaps that are quite, perfect. But he has not done more. It would have been better if he had not attempted so much. He would have done well to have heeded Goethe's caution to Ecker-

[1] 'Revolt of Islam;' 'Prometheus Unbound;' 'Epipsychidion.'

mann:[1] 'Beware of attempting a large work. . . . If you have a great work in your head, nothing else thrives near it, all other thoughts are repelled, and the pleasantness of life itself is for the time lost. What exertion and expenditure of mental force are required to arrange and round off a great whole; and then what powers, and what a tranquil, undisturbed situation in life, to express it with the proper fluency. If you have erred as to the whole, all your toil is lost; and further, if, in treating so extensive a subject, you are not perfectly master of your material in the details, the whole will be defective, and censure will be incurred.' Shelley did not know this. He was ever labouring at long poems: but he has scarcely left one which, as a whole, is worthy of him; you can point to none and say, This is Shelley. Even had he lived to an age of riper capacity, it may be doubted if a being so discontinuous, so easily hurried to and fro, would have possessed the settled, undeviating self-devotion necessary to a long and perfect composition. He had not, like Goethe, the cool shrewdness to watch for inspiration.

His success, as we have said, is in fragments; and the best of those fragments are lyrical. The very same isolation and suddenness of impulse which rendered him unfit for the composition of great works, rendered him peculiarly fit to pour forth on a sudden the intense essence of peculiar feeling 'in profuse strains of unpremeditated art.' Mr. Macaulay[2] has said that the words 'bard' and 'inspiration,' generally so meaningless when applied to modern poets, have a meaning when applied to Shelley. An idea, an emotion grew upon

[1] *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*: Sept. 18, 1823.

[2] *Essays*: 'On Southey's Edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.'

his brain, his breast heaved, his frame shook, his nerves quivered with the 'harmonious madness' of imaginative concentration.

'Poetry,' he himself tells us,[1] 'is not, like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. . . . Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression: so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object. It is, as it were, the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it.' In verse, Shelley has compared the skylark to a poet; we may turn back the description on his own art and his own mind:—

'Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear,
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

[1] *Essays*: 'A Defence of Poetry.'

'All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflowed.

'What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?
From rainbow-clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see,
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

. . . . . .

'Like a high-born maiden
In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower.

'Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aërial hue
Among the flowers and grass which screen it from the view.

'Like a rose embowered
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflowered,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-wingèd thieves.

'Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling glass,
Rain-awakened flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.'

In most poets unearthly beings are introduced to express peculiar removed essences of lyrical rapture; but they are generally failures. Lord Byron tried this kind of composition in 'Manfred,' and the result is an evident failure. In Shelley, such singing solitary beings are almost uniformly successful; while writing, his mind really for the moment was

in the state in which theirs is supposed always to be. He loved attenuated ideas and abstracted excitement. In expressing their nature he had but to set free his own.

Human nature is not, however, long equal to this sustained effort of remote excitement. The impulse fails, imagination fades, inspiration dies away. With the skylark it is well :—

> 'With thy clear keen joyance
> Langour cannot be :
> Shadow of annoyance
> Never came near thee :
> Thou lovest ; but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.'

But in unsoaring human nature languor comes, fatigue palls, melancholy oppresses, melody dies away. The universe is not all blue sky ; there is the thick fog and the heavy earth. 'The world,' says Mr. Emerson, 'is mundane.' A creeping sense of weight is part of the most aspiring nature. To the most thrilling rapture succeeds despondency, perhaps pain. To Shelley this was peculiarly natural. His dreams of reform, of a world which was to be, called up the imaginative ecstasy : his soul bounded forward into the future ; but it is not possible even to the most abstracted and excited mind to place its happiness in the expected realisation of impossible schemes, and yet not occasionally be uncertain of those schemes. The rigid frame of society, the heavy heap of traditional institutions, the solid slowness of ordinary humanity, depress the aspiring fancy. 'Since our fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning.' Occasionally we must think of our fathers. No man can always dream of ever altering all which is. It is characteristic of Shelley that at the end of his most rapturous and sanguine lyrics there intrudes the

cold consciousness of this world. So with his Grecian dreams :—

> 'A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
> From waves serener far ;
> A new Peneus rolls its fountains
> Against the morning-star.
> Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep
> Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep.
>
> 'A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
> Fraught with a later prize ;
> Another Orpheus sings again,
> And loves, and weeps, and dies.
> A new Ulysses leaves once more
> Calypso for his native shore.'

But he ends :—

> 'O, cease ! must hate and death return ?
> Cease ! must men kill and die ?
> Cease ! drain not to its dregs the urn
> Of bitter prophecy.
> The world is weary of the past—
> O, might it die or rest at last ! ' [1]

In many of his poems the failing of the feeling is as beautiful as its short moment of hope and buoyancy.

The excellence of Shelley does not, however, extend equally over the whole domain of lyrical poetry. That species of art may be divided—not perhaps with the accuracy of science, but with enough for the rough purposes of popular criticism —into the human and the abstract. The sphere of the former is of course the actual life, passions, and actions of real men,—such are the war-songs of rude nations especially ; in that early age there is no subject for art but natural life and primitive passion. At a later time, when from the deposit of the débris of a hundred philosophies, a large number

[1] *Hellas*, ll. 1066, 1096.

of half-personified abstractions are part of the familiar thoughts and language of all mankind, there are new objects to excite the feelings,—we might even say there are new feelings to be excited; the rough substance of original passion is sublimated and attenuated till we hardly recognise its identity. Ordinarily and in most minds the emotion loses in this process its intensity or much of it; but this is not universal. In some peculiar minds it is possible to find an almost dizzy intensity of excitement called forth by some fancied abstraction, remote altogether from the eyes and senses of men.

The love-lyric in its simplest form is probably the most intense expression of primitive passion; yet not in those lyrics where such intensity is the greatest—in those of Burns, for example—is the passion so dizzy, bewildering, and bewildered, as in the 'Epipsychidion' of Shelley, the passion of which never came into the real world at all, was only a fiction founded on fact, and was wholly—and even Shelley felt it—inconsistent with the inevitable conditions of ordinary existence. In this point of view, and especially also taking account of his peculiar religious opinions, it is remarkable that Shelley should have taken extreme delight in the Bible as a composition. He is the least biblical of poets. The whole, inevitable, essential conditions of real life—the whole of its plain, natural joys and sorrows—are described in the Jewish literature as they are described nowhere else. Very often they are assumed rather than delineated; and the brief assumption is more effective than the most elaborate description. There is none of the delicate sentiment and enhancing sympathy which a modern writer would think necessary; the inexorable facts are dwelt on with a stern humanity, which recognises

human feeling though intent on something above it. Of all modern poets, Wordsworth shares the most in this peculiarity; perhaps he is the only recent one who has it at all. He knew the hills beneath whose shade 'the generations are prepared:'—

> 'Much did he see of men, . . .
> Their passions and their feelings: chiefly those
> Essential and eternal in the heart,
> That 'mid the simpler forms of rural life
> Exist more simple in their elements,
> And speak a plainer language.' [1]

Shelley has nothing of this. The essential feelings he hoped to change; the eternal facts he struggled to remove. Nothing in human life to him was inevitable or fixed; he fancied he could alter it all. His sphere is the 'unconditioned'; he floats away into an imaginary Elysium or an expected Utopia; beautiful and excellent, of course, but having nothing in common with the absolute laws of the present world. Even in the description of mere nature the difference may be noted. Wordsworth describes this earth as we know it, with all its peculiarities; where there are moors and hills, where the lichen grows, where the slate-rock juts out. Shelley describes the universe. He rushes away among the stars; this earth is an assortment of imagery, he uses it to deck some unknown planet. He scorns 'the smallest light that twinkles in the heavens.' His theme is the vast, the infinite, the immeasurable. He is not of our home, nor homely; he describes not our world, but that which is common to all worlds—the Platonic idea of a world. Where it can, his genius soars from the concrete and real into the unknown, the indefinite, and the void.

Shelley's success in the abstract lyric would

[1] *Excursion*, book i.

prepare us for expecting that he would fail in attempts at eloquence. The mind which bursts forward of itself into the inane, is not likely to be eminent in the composed adjustments of measured persuasion. A voluntary self-control is necessary to the orator —even when he declaims, he must [not] only let himself go; a keen will must be ready, a wakeful attention at hand, to see that he does not say a word by which his audience will not be touched. The eloquence of 'Queen Mab' is of that unpersuasive kind which is admired in the earliest youth, when things and life are unknown, when all that is intelligible is the sound of words.

Mr. Macaulay, in a passage to which we have referred already,[1] speaks of Shelley as having, more than any other poet, many of the qualities of the great old masters; two of these he has especially. In the first place, his imagination is classical rather than romantic,—we should, perhaps, apologise for using words which have been used so often, but which hardly convey even now a clear and distinct meaning; yet they seem the best for conveying a distinction of this sort.

When we attempt to distinguish the imagination from the fancy, we find that they are often related as a beginning to an ending. On a sudden we do not know how a new image, form, idea, occurs to our minds; sometimes it is borne in upon us with a flash, sometimes we seem unawares to stumble upon it, and find it as if it had long been there: in either case the involuntary, unanticipated appearance of this new thought or image is a primitive fact which we cannot analyse or account for. We say it originated in our imagination or creative faculty: but this is a mere expression of the completeness of our ignor-

[1] *Supra*, p. 143.

ance; we could only define the imagination as the faculty which produces such effects; we know nothing of it or its constitution. Again, on this original idea a large number of accessory and auxiliary ideas seem to grow or accumulate insensibly, casually, and without our intentional effort; the bare primitive form attracts a clothing of delicate materials—an adornment not altering its essences, but enhancing its effect. This we call the work of the fancy. An exquisite delicacy in appropriating fitting accessories is as much the characteristic excellence of a fanciful mind, as the possession of large, simple, bold ideas is of an imaginative one. The last is immediate; the first comes minute by minute.

The distinction is like what one fancies between sculpture and painting. If we look at a delicate statue—a Venus or Juno—it does not suggest any slow elaborate process by which its expression was chiselled and its limbs refined; it seems a simple fact; we look, and require no account of it; it exists. The greatest painting suggests, not only a creative act, but a decorative process: day by day there was something new; we could watch the tints laid on, the dresses tinged, the perspective growing and growing. There is something statuesque about the imagination; there is the gradual complexity of painting in the most exquisite productions of the fancy. When we speak of this distinction, we seem almost to be speaking of the distinction between ancient and modern literature. The characteristic of the classical literature is the simplicity with which the imagination appears in it; that of modern literature is the profusion with which the most various adornments of the accessory fancy are thrown and lavished upon it. Perhaps nowhere is this more conspicuous than in the modern treatment of antique

subjects. One of the most essentially modern of recent poets [Keats] has an ode 'On a Grecian Urn:' it begins:—

> 'Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness!
> Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
> Sylvan historian! who canst thus express
> A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
> What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
> Of deities or mortals, or of both,
> In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
> What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
> What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
> What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?'

No ancient poet would have dreamed of writing thus. There would have been no indistinct shadowy warmth, no breath of surrounding beauty; his delineation would have been cold, distinct, chiselled like the urn itself. The use which such a poet as Keats makes of ancient mythology is exactly similar. He owes his fame to the inexplicable art with which he has breathed a soft tint over the marble forms of gods and goddesses, enhancing their beauty without impairing their chasteness. The naked kind of imagination is not peculiar to a mythological age. The growth of civilisation, at least in Greece, rather increased than diminished the imaginative bareness of the poetical art. It seems to attain its height in Sophocles. If we examine any of his greater passages, a principal beauty is their reserved simplicity. A modern reader almost necessarily uses them as materials for fancy: we are too used to little circumstance to be able to do without it. Take the passage in which Œdipus contrasts the conduct of his sons with that of his daughters:—

> ὦ πάντ' ἐκείνω τοῖς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ νόμοις
> φύσιν κατεικασθέντε καὶ βίου τροφάς.
> ἐκεῖ γὰρ οἱ μὲν ἄρσενες κατὰ στέγας

θακοῦσιν ἱστουργοῦντες, αἱ δὲ σύννομοι
τᾶξω βίου τροφεῖα παρσύνουσ' ἀεί.
σφῷν δ', ὦ τέκν', οὓς μὲν εἰκὸς ἦν πονεῖν τάδε,
κατ' οἶκον οἰκουροῦσιν ὥστε παρθένοι,
σφὼ δ' ἀντ' ἐκείνων τἀμὰ δυστήνου κακὰ
ὑπερπονεῖτον. ἡ μὲν ἐξ ὅτου νέας
τροφῆς ἔληξε καὶ κατίσχυσεν δέμας,
ἀεί μεθ' ἡμῶν δύσμορος πλανωμένη
γερονταγωγεῖ, πολλὰ μὲν κατ' ἀγρίαν
ὕλην ἄσιτος νηλίπους τ' ἀλωμένη,
πολλοῖσι δ' ὄμβροις ἠλίου τε καύμασιν
μοχθοῦσα τλήμων, δεύτερ' ἠγεῖται τὰ τῆς
οἴκοι διαίτης, εἰ πατὴρ τροφὴν ἔχοι.[1]

What a contrast to the ravings of Lear! What a world of detail Shakespeare would have put into the passage! What talk of 'sulphurous and thought-executing fires,' 'simulars of virtue,' 'pent-up guilts,' and 'the thick rotundity of the world!' Decorum is the principal thing in Sophocles. The conception of Œdipus is not—

'Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,
With harlocks,[2] hemlock, nettles, and cuckoo-flowers.'[3]

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[1] 'Œdipus at Colonos,' lines 337–352, translated thus by Prof. Lewis Campbell:—

'In all points their life obeys the law
Of Egypt, where the men keep house and weave,
Sitting within-doors, while the wives abroad
Provide, with ceaseless toil, the means of life.
So in your case, my daughters, they who should
Have ta'en this burden on them, bide at home
Like maidens, while ye take their place, and lighten
My miseries by your toil. Antigone,
E'er since her childhood ended, and her frame
Was firmly knit, with ceaseless ministry
Still tends upon the old man's wandering,
Oft in the forest ranging up and down,
Fasting and barefoot, through the burning heat
Or pelting rain, nor thinks, unhappy maid,
Of home or comfort, so her father's need
Be satisfied.'

[2] 'burdocks.'

[3] *King Lear*, IV. iv. 3.

There are no 'idle weeds'[1] among the 'sustaining corn.' The conception of Lear is that of an old gnarled oak, gaunt and quivering in the stormy sky, with old leaves and withered branches tossing in the air, and all the complex growth of a hundred years creaking and nodding to its fall. That of Œdipus is the peak of Teneriffe, as we fancied it in our childhood, by itself and snowy, above among the stormy clouds, heedless of the angry winds and the desolate waves,—single, ascending, and alone. Or, to change the metaphor to one derived from an art where the same qualities of mind have produced kindred effects, ancient poetry is like a Grecian temple, with pure form and rising columns,—created, one fancies, by a single effort of an originative nature: modern literature seems to have sprung from the involved brain of a Gothic architect, and resembles a huge cathedral—the work of the perpetual industry of centuries—complicated and infinite in details; but by their choice and elaboration producing an effect of unity which is not inferior to that of the other, and is heightened by the multiplicity through which it is conveyed. And it is this warmth of circumstance—this profusion of interesting detail—which has caused the name 'romantic' to be perseveringly applied to modern literature.

We need only to open Shelley, to show how essentially classical in his highest efforts his art is. Indeed, although nothing can be farther removed from the staple topics of the classical writers than the abstract lyric, yet their treatment is nearly essential to it. We have said its sphere is in what the Germans call the unconditioned—in the unknown, immeasurable, and untrodden. It follows from this that we cannot know much about it. We cannot

[1] *King Lear*, IV. iv. 5, 6.

know detail in tracts we have never visited; the infinite has no form; the immeasurable no outline: that which is common to all worlds is simple. There is therefore no scope for the accessory fancy. With a single soaring effort imagination may reach her end; if she fail, no fancy can help her; if she succeed, there will be no petty accumulations of insensible circumstance in a region far above all things. Shelley's excellence in the abstract lyric is almost another phrase for the simplicity of his impulsive imagination.—He shows it on other subjects also. We have spoken of his bare treatment of the ancient mythology. It is the same with his treatment of nature. In the description of the celestial regions quoted before — one of the most characteristic passages in his writings—the details are few, the air thin, the lights distinct. We are conscious of an essential difference if we compare the 'Ode to a Nightingale,' in Keats, for instance—such verses as

'I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs:
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine,
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

'Darkling I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath:
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod:'

—with the conclusion of the ode 'To a Skylark'—

'Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

'Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

'Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know;
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now.'

We can hear that the poetry of Keats is a rich, composite, voluptuous harmony; that of Shelley a clear single ring of penetrating melody.

Of course, however, this criticism requires limitation. There is an obvious sense in which Shelley is a fanciful, as contra-distinguished from an imaginative poet. These words, being invented for the popular expression of differences which can be remarked without narrow inspection, are apt to mislead us when we apply them to the exact results of a near and critical analysis. Besides the use of the word 'fancy' to denote the power which adorns and amplifies the product of the primitive imagination, we also employ it to denote the weaker exercise of the faculty which itself creates those elementary products. We use the word 'imaginative' only for strong, vast, imposing, interesting conceptions: we use the word 'fanciful' when we have to speak of smaller and weaker creations, which amaze us

less at the moment and affect us more slightly afterwards.

Of course, metaphysically speaking, it is not likely that there will be found to be any distinction ; the faculty which creates the most attractive ideas is doubtless the same as that which creates the less attractive. Common language marks the distinction, because common people are impressed by the contrast between what affects them much and what affects them little ; but it is no evidence of the entire difference of the latent agencies. Speech, as usual, refers to sensations, and not to occult causes. Of fancies of this sort, Shelley is full : whole poems—as the ' Witch of Atlas '—are composed of nothing else. Living a good deal in, and writing a great deal about, the abstract world, [it was] inevitable that he should often deal in fine subtleties, affecting very little the concrete hearts of real men. Many pages of his are, in consequence, nearly unintelligible, even to good critics of common poetry. The air is too rarefied for hardy and healthy lungs : these like, as Lord Bacon expressed it, ' to work upon stuff.' From his habitual choice of slight and airy subjects, Shelley may be called a fanciful as opposed to an imaginative, poet ; from his bare delineations of great objects, his keen expression of distinct impulses, he should be termed an imaginative rather than a fanciful one.

Some of this odd combination of qualities Shelley doubtless owed to the structure of his senses. By one of those singular results which constantly meet us in metaphysical inquiry, the imagination and fancy are singularly influenced by the bodily sensibility. One might have fancied that the faculty by which the soul soars into the infinite, and sees what it cannot see with the eye of the body, would have

been peculiarly independent of that body. But the reverse is the case. Vividness of sensation seems required to awaken, delicacy to define, copiousness to enrich, the visionary faculty. A large experience proves that a being who is blind to this world will be blind to the other; that a coarse expectation of what is not seen will follow from a coarse perception of what is seen. Shelley's sensibility was vivid but peculiar. Hazlitt used to say, 'he had seen him; and did not like his looks.' He had the thin keen excitement of the fanatic student; not the broad, natural energy which Hazlitt expected from a poet. The diffused life of genial enjoyment which was common to Scott and to Shakespeare, was quite out of his way. Like Mr. Emerson, he would have wondered they could be content with a 'mean and jocular life.' In consequence, there is no varied imagery from human life in his poetry. He was an abstract student, anxious about deep philosophy; and he had not that settled, contemplative, allotted acquaintance with external nature which is so curious in Milton, the greatest of studious poets.

The exact opposite, however, to Shelley, in the nature of his sensibility, is Keats. That great poet used to pepper his tongue, 'to enjoy in all its grandeur the cool flavour of delicious claret.' When you know it, you seem to read it in his poetry. There is the same luxurious sentiment; the same poise on fine sensation. Shelley was the reverse of this; he was a water-drinker; his verse runs quick and chill, like a pure crystal stream. The sensibility of Keats was attracted too by the spectacle of the universe; he could not keep his eye from seeing, or his ear from hearing, the glories of it. All the beautiful objects of nature reappear by name in his poetry. On the other hand, the abstract idea of beauty is for

ever celebrated in Shelley ; it haunted his soul. But it was independent of special things ; it was the general surface of beauty which lies upon all things. It was the smile of the universe and the expression of the world ; it was not the vision of a land of corn and wine. The nerves of Shelley quivered at the idea of loveliness ; but no coarse sensation obtruded particular objects upon him. He was left to himself with books and reflection.

So far, indeed, from Shelley having a peculiar tendency to dwell on and prolong the sensation of pleasure, he has a perverse tendency to draw out into lingering keenness the torture of agony. Of his common recurrence to the dizzy pain of mania we have formerly spoken ; but this is not the only pain. The nightshade is commoner in his poems than the daisy. The nerve is ever laid bare ; as often as it touches the open air of the real world, it quivers with subtle pain. The high intellectual impulses which animated him are too incorporeal for human nature ; they begin in buoyant joy, they end in eager suffering.

In style, said Mr. Wordsworth—in workmanship, we think his expression was—Shelley is one of the best of us. This too, we think, was the second of the peculiarities to which Mr. Macaulay referred when he said that Shelley had, more than any recent poet, some of the qualities of the great old masters. The peculiarity of his style is its intellectuality ; and this strikes us the more from its contrast with his impulsiveness. He had something of this in life. Hurried away by sudden desires, as he was in his choice of ends, we are struck with a certain comparative measure and adjustment in his choice of means. So in his writings ; over the most intense excitement, the grandest objects, the keenest agony,

the most buoyant joy, he throws an air of subtle mind. His language is minutely and acutely searching; at the dizziest height of meaning the keenness of the words is greatest. As in mania, so in his descriptions of it, the acuteness of the mind seems to survive the mind itself. It was from Plato and Sophocles, doubtless, that he gained the last perfection in preserving the accuracy of the intellect when treating of the objects of the imagination; but in its essence, it was a peculiarity of his own nature. As it was the instinct of Byron to give in glaring words the gross phenomena of evident objects, so it was that of Shelley to refine the most inscrutable with the curious nicety of an attenuating metaphysician. In the wildest of ecstasies his self-anatomising intellect is equal to itself.

There is much more which might be said, and which ought to be said, of Shelley; but our limits are reached. We have not attempted a complete criticism; we have only aimed to show how some of the peculiarities of his works and life may be traced to the peculiarity of his nature.

JOHN MILTON.[1]

THE *Life of Milton*, by Professor Masson, is a difficulty for the critics. It is very laborious, very learned, and in the main, we believe, very accurate. It is exceedingly long,—there are 780 pages in this volume, and there are to be two volumes more: it touches on very many subjects, and each of these has been investigated to the very best of the author's ability. No one can wish to speak with censure of a book on which so much genuine labour has been expended; and yet we are bound, as true critics, to say that we think it has been composed upon a principle that is utterly erroneous. In justice to ourselves we must explain our meaning.

There are two methods on which biography may consistently be written. The first of these is what we may call the exhaustive method. Every fact which is known about the hero may be told us; everything which he did, everything which he would not do, everything which other people did to him, everything which other people would not do to him,—

[1] [NATIONAL REVIEW: July 1859.]—*The Life of John Milton, narrated in connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his time.* By David Masson, M.A., Professor of English Literature in University College, London. Cambridge: Macmillan.

An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton. By Thomas Keightley; with an Introduction to *Paradise Lost.* London: Chapman & Hall.

The Poems of Milton, with Notes by Thomas Keightley. London: Chapman & Hall.

may be narrated at full length. We may have a complete picture of all the events of his life; of all which he underwent, and all which he achieved. We may, as Mr. Carlyle expresses it, have a complete account 'of his effect upon the universe, and of the effect of the universe upon him.' We admit that biographies of this species would be very long and generally very tedious, we know that the world could not contain very many of them; but nevertheless the principle on which they may be written is intelligible.

The second method on which the life of a man may be written is the selective. Instead of telling everything, we may choose what we will tell. We may select out of the numberless events, from among the innumerable actions of his life, those events and those actions which exemplify his true character, which prove to us what were the true limits of his talents, what was the degree of his deficiencies, which were his defects, which his vices,—in a word, we may select the traits and the particulars which seem to give us the best idea of the man as he lived and as he was. On this side the flood, as Sydney Smith would have said, we should have fancied that this was the only practicable principle on which biographies can be written about persons of whom many details are recorded. For ancient heroes the exhaustive method is possible. All that can be known of them is contained in a few short passages of Greek and Latin, and it is quite possible to say whatever can be said about every one of these: the result would not be unreasonably bulky, though it might be dull. But in the case of men who have lived in the thick of the crowded modern world, no such course is admissible; overmuch *may* be said, and we must choose what we will say.

Biographers, however, are rarely bold enough to

adopt the selective method consistently. They have, we suspect, the fear of the critics before their eyes. They do not like that it should be said that 'the work of the learned gentleman contains serious omissions: the events of 1562 are not mentioned; those of October 1579 are narrated but very cursorily;' and we fear that in any case such remarks will be made. Very learned people are pleased to show that they know what is *not* in the book; sometimes they may hint that perhaps the author did not know it, or surely he would have mentioned it. But a biographer who wishes to write what most people of cultivation will be pleased to read must be courageous enough to face the pain of such censures. He must choose, as we have explained, the characteristic parts of his subject; and all that he has to take care of besides, is so to narrate them that their characteristic elements shall be shown: to give such an account of the general career as may make it clear what these chosen events really were; to show their respective bearings to one another; to delineate what is expressive in such a manner as to make it expressive.

This plan of biography is, however, by no means that of Mr. Masson. He has no dread of overgrown bulk and overwhelming copiousness. He finds, indeed, what we have called the exhaustive method insufficient. He not only wishes to narrate in full the life of Milton, but to add those of his contemporaries likewise: he seems to wish to tell us not only what Milton did, but also what every one else did in Great Britain during his lifetime. He intends his book to be not 'merely a biography of Milton, but also in some sort a continuous history of his time. . . . The suggestions of Milton's life have indeed determined the tracks of these historical researches

and expositions, sometimes through the literature of the period, sometimes through its civil and ecclesiastical politics; but the extent to which I have pursued them, and the space which I have assigned to them, have been determined by my desire to present, by their combination, something like a connected historical view of British thought and British society in general prior to the Revolution.'

We need not do more than observe that this union of heterogeneous aims must always end, as it has in this case, in the production of a work at once overgrown and incomplete. A great deal which has only a slight bearing on the character of Milton is inserted; much that is necessary to a true history of 'British thought and British society' is of necessity left out. The period of Milton's life which is included in the published volume makes the absurdity especially apparent. In middle life Milton was a great controversialist on contemporary topics; and though it would not be proper for a biographer to load his pages with a full account of all such controversies, yet some notice of the most characteristic of them would be expected from him. In this part of Milton's life some reference to public events would be necessary; and we should not severely censure a biographer if the great interest of those events induced him to stray a little from his topic. But the first thirty years of Milton's life require a very different treatment. He passed those years in the ordinary musings of a studious and meditative youth; it was the period of *Lycidas* and of *Comus*; he then dreamed the

> 'Sights which youthful poets dream
> On summer eve by haunted stream.' [1]

[1] *L'Allegro*: adapted.

We do not wish to have this part of his life disturbed, to a greater extent than may be necessary, with the harshness of public affairs. Nor is it necessary that it should be so disturbed. A life of poetic retirement requires but little reference to anything except itself. In a biography of Mr. Tennyson we should not expect to hear of the Reform Bill, or the Corn Laws. Mr. Masson is, however, of a different opinion. He thinks it necessary to tell us, not only all which Milton did, but everything also that he might have heard of.

The biography of Mr. Keightley is on a very different scale. He tells the story of Milton's career in about half a small volume. Probably this is a little too concise, and the narrative is somewhat dry and bare. It is often, however, acute, and is always clear; and even were its defects greater than they are, we should think it unseemly to criticise the last work of one who has performed so many useful services to literature with extreme severity. And we must observe that in one respect Mr. Keightley contrasts very favourably with Mr. Masson: he only tells his readers what he knows did happen; Mr. Masson is fond of telling us what he thinks may have happened. We have some such passages as the following:—

"'Look back, reader, and see him as I do! Now under the elms on his father's lawn, he listens to the rural hum, and marks the branches as they wave, and the birds as they fly; now, in the garden, he notes the annual series of the plants and the daily blooming of the roses. In his walks in the neighbourhood, also, he observes not only the wayside vegetation, but the whole wide face of the landscape, rich in wood and meadow, to the royal towers of Windsor and the bounding line of the low Surrey hills. Over this landscape, changing its livery from day to day, fall the varying seasons. Light green spring comes with its showers and its days of keener blue, when nature is warm at the root, and all

things gain in liveliness ; spring changes into summer, when all is one wealth of leafage, and the gorgeous bloom of the orchards passes into the forming fruit ; summer deepens into autumn, gathering the tanned haycocks and tumbling the golden grain ; and, at last, when the brown and yellow leaves have fallen, and the winds have blown them and the rains rotted them, comes winter with his biting breath, and the fields are either all white, so that the most familiar eye hardly knows them, or they lie in mire, and, in the dull brumous air, the stripped stems and netted twig-work of the trees are like a painting in China ink. And these seasons have each their occupations. Now the plough is afield ; now the sower casts the seed ; now the sheep are shorn ; now the mower whets his scythe. There is, moreover, the quicker continual alternation of night and day, dipping the landscape in darkness or in lunar tints, and bringing it back again, as Aurora rises, in all the colours of the morn. In summer the twilight steals slowly over the lawn, and, seated at the open window, the poet who has heard the lark's carol abroad by day, will listen in the stillness for the first song of the nightingale ; and when the night is farther advanced, may there not be a walk on the lawn, to observe the trembling tops of the poplars, and to drink, ere the soul is done with that day more, the solemnising glory of the tranquil stars ? Look on, thou glorious youth, at stars and trees, at the beauties of day and the beauties of night, at the changing aspects of the seasons, and at all that the seasons bring ! ' [1]

Perhaps this is what Mr. Punch would call ' moonshine,' and Mr. Masson, ' lunar tints.' Such fanciful eloquence is teasing to the reader. If we are to have fancies, we like to have our own. At least, if our own are disturbed, we wish them to be replaced by others which are better. Mr. Masson has neither the humour of imagination, nor the delicacy of style, which in other hands have made these hypotheses pleasing. Mr. Carlyle is almost our only master of delineative conjecture.

The bare outline of Milton's life is very well known. We have all heard that he was born in the later years of King James, just when Puritanism was collecting its strength for the approaching struggle ;

[1] *Life of Milton*, vol. i. chap. vii.

that his father and mother were quiet good people, inclined, but not immoderately, to that persuasion; that he went up to Cambridge early, and had some kind of dissension with the authorities there; that the course of his youth was in a singular degree pure and staid; that in boyhood he was a devourer of books, and that he early became, and always remained, a severely studious man; that he married, and had difficulties of a peculiar character with his first wife; that he wrote on Divorce; that after the death of his first wife, he married a second time a lady who died very soon, and a third time a person who survived him more than fifty years; that he wrote early poems of singular beauty, which we still read; that he travelled in Italy, and exhibited his learning in the academies there; that he plunged deep in the theological and political controversies of his time; that he kept a school, or rather, in our more modern phrase, took pupils; that he was a republican of a peculiar kind, and of 'no Church,' which Dr. Johnson thought dangerous; that he was Secretary for Foreign Languages under the Long Parliament, and retained that office after the *coup d'état* of Cromwell; that he defended the death of Charles the First, and became blind from writing a book in haste upon that subject; that after the Restoration he was naturally in a position of some danger and much difficulty; that in the midst of that difficulty he wrote *Paradise Lost*; that he did not fail in heart or hope, but lived for fourteen years after the destruction of all for which he had laboured, in serene retirement, 'though fallen on evil days, though fallen on evil times;'[1] all this we have heard from our boyhood. How much is wanting to complete the picture—how many traits, both noble

[1] Cf. *Paradise Lost*, vii. 24; *infra*, p. 196.

and painful, might be recovered from the past—we shall never know, till some biographer skilled in interpreting the details of human nature shall select this subject for his art.

All that we can hope to do in an essay like this is to throw together some miscellaneous remarks on the character of the Puritan poet, and on the peculiarities of his works; and if in any part of them we may seem to make unusual criticisms, and to be over-ready with depreciation or objection, our excuse must be that we wish to paint a likeness, and that the harsher features of the subject should have a prominence, even in an outline.

There are two kinds of goodness conspicuous in the world, and often made the subject of contrast there; for which, however, we seem to want exact words, and which we are obliged to describe rather vaguely and incompletely. These characters may in one aspect be called the sensuous and the ascetic. The character of the first is that which is almost personified in the poet-king of Israel, whose actions and whose history have been 'improved' so often by various writers, that it now seems trite even to allude to them. Nevertheless, the particular virtues and the particular career of David seem to embody the idea of what may be called sensuous goodness far more completely than a living being in general comes near to an abstract idea. There may have been shades in the actual man which would have modified the resemblance; but in the portrait which has been handed down to us, the traits are perfect and the approximation exact. The principle of this character is its sensibility to outward stimulus; it is moved by all which occurs, stirred by all which happens, open to the influences of whatever it sees, hears, or meets with. The certain consequence of this mental

constitution is a peculiar liability to temptation. Men are, according to the divine, 'put upon their trial through the senses.' It is through the constant suggestions of the outer world that our minds are stimulated, that our will has the chance of a choice, that moral life becomes possible. The sensibility to this external stimulus brings with it, when men have it to excess, an unusual access of moral difficulty. Everything acts on them, and everything has a chance of turning them aside; the most tempting things act upon them very deeply, and their influence, in consequence, is extreme. Naturally, therefore, the errors of such men are great. We need not point the moral—

> 'Dizzied faith, and guilt, and woe;
> Loftiest aims by earth defiled,
> Gleams of wisdom sin-beguiled,
> Sated power's tyrannic mood,
> Counsels shared with men of blood,
> Sad success, parental tears,
> And a dreary gift of years.'[1]

But, on the other hand, the excellence of such men has a charm, a kind of sensuous sweetness, that is its own. Being conscious of frailty, they are tender to the imperfect; being sensitive to this world, they sympathise with the world; being familiar with all the moral incidents of life, their goodness has a richness and a complication: they fascinate their own age, and in their deaths they are 'not divided' from the love of others. Their peculiar sensibility gives a depth to their religion; it is at once deeper and more human than that of other men. As their sympathetic knowledge of those whom they have seen is great, so it is with their knowledge of Him whom they have not seen; and as is their knowledge,

[1] Newman's *Verses on Various Occasions*: 'The Call of David.'

so is their love; it is deep, from their nature; rich and intimate, from the variety of their experience; chastened by the ever-present sense of their weakness and of its consequences.

In extreme opposition to this is the ascetic species of goodness. This is not, as is sometimes believed, a self-produced ideal—a simply voluntary result of discipline and restraint. Some men have by nature what others have to elaborate by effort. Some men have a repulsion from the world. All of us have, in some degree, a protective instinct; an impulse, that is to say, to start back from what may trouble us, to shun what may fascinate us, to avoid what may tempt us. On the moral side of human nature this preventive check is occasionally imperious; it holds the whole man under its control,—makes him recoil from the world, be offended at its amusements, be repelled by its occupations, be scared by its sins. The consequences of this tendency, when it is thus in excess, upon the character are very great and very singular. It secludes a man in a sort of natural monastery; he lives in a kind of moral solitude; and the effects of his isolation for good and for evil on his disposition are very many. The best result is a singular capacity for meditative religion. Being aloof from what is earthly, such persons are shut up with what is spiritual; being unstirred by the incidents of time, they are alone with the eternal; rejecting this life, they are alone with what is beyond.

According to the measure of their minds, men of this removed and secluded excellence become eminent for a settled and brooding piety, for a strong and predominant religion. In human life, too, in a thousand ways, their isolated excellence is apparent. They walk through the whole of it with an abstinence from sense, a zeal of morality, a purity of ideal,

which other men have not. Their religion has an imaginative grandeur, and their life something of an unusual impeccability. And these are obviously singular excellences. But the deficiencies to which the same character tends are equally singular. In the first place, their isolation gives them a certain pride in themselves, and an inevitable ignorance of others. They are secluded by their constitutional δαίμων from life; they are repelled from the pursuits which others care for; they are alarmed at the amusements which others enjoy. In consequence, they trust in their own thoughts; they come to magnify both them and themselves—for being able to think and to retain them. The greater the nature of the man, the greater is this temptation. His thoughts are greater, and, in consequence, the greater is his tendency to prize them, the more extreme is his tendency to overrate them.

This pride, too, goes side by side with a want of sympathy. Being aloof from others, such a mind is unlike others; and it feels, and sometimes it feels bitterly, its own unlikeness. Generally, however, it is too wrapt up in its own exalted thoughts to be sensible of the pain of moral isolation; it stands apart from others, unknowing and unknown. It is deprived of moral experience in two ways,—it is not tempted itself, and it does not comprehend the temptations of others.

And this defect of moral experience is almost certain to produce two effects, one practical and the other speculative. When such a man is wrong, he will be apt to believe that he is right. If his own judgment err, he will not have the habit of checking it by the judgment of others; he will be accustomed to think most men wrong; differing from them would be no proof of error, agreeing with them

would rather be a basis for suspicion. He may, too, be very wrong, for the conscience of no man is perfect on all sides. The strangeness of secluded excellence will be sometimes deeply shaded by very strange errors. To be commonly above others, still more to think yourself above others, is to be below them every now and then, and sometimes much below. Again, on the speculative side, this defect of moral experience penetrates into the distinguishing excellence of the character,—its brooding and meditative religion. Those who see life under only one aspect, can see religion under only one likewise. This world is needful to interpret what is beyond; the seen must explain the unseen. It is from a tried and a varied and a troubled moral life that the deepest and truest idea of God arises. The ascetic character wants these; therefore in its religion there will be a harshness of outline, a bareness, so to say, as well as a grandeur. In life we may look for a singular purity; but also, and with equal probability, for singular self-confidence, a certain unsympathising straitness, and perhaps a few singular errors.

The character of the ascetic, or austere species of goodness, is almost exactly embodied in Milton. Men, indeed, are formed on no ideal type. Human nature has tendencies too various, and circumstances too complex. All men's characters have sides and aspects not to be comprehended in a single definition; but in this case, the extent to which the character of the man, as we find it delineated, approaches to the moral abstraction which we sketch from theory, is remarkable. The whole being of Milton may, in some sort, be summed up in the great commandment of the austere character, 'Reverence thyself.' We find it expressed in almost every one of his

singular descriptions of himself,—of those striking passages which are scattered through all his works, and which add to whatever interest may intrinsically belong to them one of the rarest of artistic charms, that of magnanimous autobiography. They have been quoted a thousand times, but one of them may perhaps be quoted again :—

'I had my time, readers, as others have, who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places, where the opinion was it might be soonest attained; and as the manner is, was not unstudied in those authors which are most commended; whereof some were grave orators and historians, whose matter methought I loved indeed, but as my age then was, so I understand them; others were the smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce, whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing, which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me, and for their matter, which what it is, there be few who know not, I was so allured to read, that no recreation came to me better welcome: for that it was then those years with me which are excused, though they be least severe, I may be saved the labour to remember ye. Whence having observed them to account it the chief glory of their wit, in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love those high perfections, which under one or other name they took to celebrate, I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature, which is not wont to be false, that what emboldened them to this task, might with such diligence as they used embolden me; and that what judgment, wit, or elegance was my share, would herein best appear, and best value itself, by how much more wisely, and with more love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent) the object of not unlike praises: for albeit these thoughts to some will seem virtuous and commendable, to others only pardonable, to a third sort perhaps idle; yet the mentioning of them now will end in serious.

'Nor blame it, readers, in those years to propose to themselves such a reward, as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred: whereof not to be sensible when good and fair in one person meet, argues both a gross and shallow judgment, and withal an ungentle and swainish breast. For by the firm settling of these persuasions, I became, to my best memory, so

much a proficient, that if I found those authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled, this effect it wrought with me, from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored; and above them all, preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.' [1]

It may be fanciful to add, and we may be laughed at, but we believe that the self-reverencing propensity was a little aided by his singular personal beauty. All the describers of his youth concur in telling us that this was very remarkable. Mr. Masson has the following account of it:—

'When Milton left Cambridge in July 1632, he was twenty-three years and eight months old. In stature, therefore, at least, he was already whatever he was to be. "In stature," he says himself at a latter period, when driven to speak on the subject, "I confess I am not tall, but still of what is nearer to middle height than to little: and what if I were of little; of which stature have often been very great men both in peace and war—though why should that be called little which is great enough for virtue?" ("*Staturâ, fateor, non sum procerâ, sed quæ mediocri tamen quàm parvæ propior sit; sed quid si parvâ, quâ et summi sæpe tum pace tum bello viri fuere—quanquam parvâ cur dicitur, quæ ad virtutem satis magna est?*") This is precise enough; but we have Aubrey's words to the same effect: "He was scarce so tall as I am," says Aubrey; to which, to make it more intelligible, he appends this marginal note: "*Qu. Quot* feet I am high? *Resp.* Of middle stature;"—*i.e.*, Milton was a little under middle height. "He had light brown hair," continues Aubrey,—putting the word "abrown" ("auburn") in the margin by way of synonym for "light brown;"—

[1] *Apology for Smectymnuus.*

"his complexion exceeding fair; oval face; his eye a dark grey.'" [1]

We are far from accusing Milton of personal vanity. His character was too enormous, if we may be allowed so to say, for a fault so petty. But a little tinge of excessive self-respect will cling to those who can admire themselves. Ugly men are and ought to be ashamed of their existence. Milton was not so.

The peculiarities of the austere type of character stand out in Milton more remarkably than in other men who partake of it, because of the extreme strength of his nature. In reading him this is the first thing that strikes us. We seem to have left the little world of ordinary writers. The words of some authors are said to have 'hands and feet'; they seem, that is, to have a vigour and animation which only belongs to things which live and move. Milton's words have not this animal life. There is no rude energy about them. But, on the other hand, they have, or seem to have, a soul, a spirit which other words have not. He was early aware that what he wrote, 'by certain vital signs it had,' was such as the world would not 'willingly let die.' [2] After two centuries we feel the same. There is a solemn and firm music in the lines; a brooding sublimity haunts them; the spirit of the great writer moves over the face of the page.

In life there seems to have been the same peculiar strength that his works suggest to us. His moral tenacity is amazing. He took his own course, and he kept his own course; and we may trace in his defects the same characteristics. 'Energy and ill-temper,' some say, 'are the same thing;' and

[1] *Life of Milton*, vol. i. chap. iv.
[2] *Reason of Church Government*, Introduction to book ii.

though this is a strong exaggeration, yet there is a basis of truth in it. People who labour much will be cross if they do not obtain that for which they labour; those who desire vehemently will be vexed if they do not obtain that which they desire. As is the strength of the impelling tendency, so, other things being equal, is the pain which it will experience if it be baffled. Those, too, who are set on what is high will be proportionately offended by the intrusion of what is low. Accordingly, Milton is described by those who knew him as a 'harsh and choleric man.' 'He had,' we are told, 'a gravity in his temper, not melancholy, or not till the latter part of his life,—not sour, not morose, nor ill-natured; but a certain severity of mind, not condescending to little things;' —and this, although his daughter remembered that he was delightful company, the life of conversation, and that he was so 'on account of a flow of subjects and an unaffected cheerfulness and civility.' Doubtless this may have been so when he was at ease, and at home. But there are unmistakable traces of the harsher tendency in almost all his works.

Some of the peculiarities of the ascetic character were likewise augmented by his studious disposition. This began very early in life, and continued till the end. 'My father,' he says, 'destined me [while yet a child] to the study of polite literature, which I embraced with such avidity, that from the twelfth year of my age I hardly ever retired to rest from my studies till midnight, which was the first source of injury to my eyes, to the natural weakness of which were added frequent headaches; all of which not retarding my eagerness after knowledge, he took care to have me instructed,'[1] etc. Every page of

[1] *Second Defence of the People of England*: cf. Keightley (*sup. cit.*), p. 6.

his works shows the result of this education. In spite of the occupations of manhood, and the blindness and melancholy of old age, he still continued to have his principal pleasure in that 'studious and select reading,' which, though often curiously transmuted, is perpetually involved in the very texture of his works. We need not stay to observe how a habit in itself so autere conduces to the development of an austere character. Deep study, especially deep study which haunts and rules the imagination, necessarily removes men from life, absorbs them in themselves; purifies their conduct, with some risk of isolating their sympathies; develops that loftiness of mood which is gifted with deep inspirations and indulged with great ideas, but which tends in its excess to engender a contempt for others, and a self-appreciation which is even more displeasing to them.

These same tendencies were aggravated also by two defects which are exceedingly rare in great English authors, and which perhaps Milton alone amongst those of the highest class is in a remarkable degree chargeable with. We mean a deficiency in humour, and a deficiency in a knowledge of plain human nature. Probably when, after the lapse of ages, English literature is looked at in its larger features only, and in comparison with other literatures which have preceded or which may follow it, the critics will lay down that its most striking characteristic as a whole is its involution, so to say, in life; the degree to which its book life resembles real life; the extent to which the motives, dispositions, and actions of common busy persons are represented in a medium which would seem likely to give us peculiarly the ideas of secluded, and the tendencies of meditative men.

It is but an aspect of this fact, that English literature abounds,—some critics will say abounds excessively,—with humour. This is in some sense the imaginative element of ordinary life,—the relieving charm, partaking at once of contrast and similitude, which gives a human and an intellectual interest to the world of clowns and cottages, of fields and farmers. The degree to which Milton is deficient in this element is conspicuous in every page of his writings where its occurrence could be looked for; and if we do not always look for it, that is because the subjects of his most remarkable works are on a removed elevation, where ordinary life, the world of 'cakes and ale,' is never thought of and never expected. It is in his dramas, as we should expect, that Milton shows this deficiency the most. 'Citizens' never talk in his pages as they do in Shakespeare. We feel instinctively that Milton's eye had never rested with the same easy pleasure on the easy, ordinary, shop-keeping world. Perhaps, such is the complication of art, it is on the most tragic occasions that we feel this want the most.

It may seem an odd theory, and yet we believe it to be a true principle, that catastrophes require a comic element. We appear to feel the same principle in life. We may read solemn descriptions of great events in history,—say of Lord Strafford's trial, and of his marvellous speech, and his appeal to his 'saint in heaven;' but we comprehend the whole transaction much better when we learn from Mr. Baillie, the eye-witness, that people ate nuts and apples, and talked and laughed and betted on the great question of acquittal and condemnation. Nor is it difficult to understand why this should be so. It seems to be a law of the imagination, at least in most men, that it will not bear concentration. It is

essentially a glancing faculty. It goes and comes, and comes and goes, and we hardly know whence or why. But we most of us know that, when we try to fix it, in a moment it passes away. Accordingly, the proper procedure of art is to let it go in such a manner as to ensure its coming back again. The force of artistic contrasts effects exactly this result. Skilfully disposed opposites suggest the notion of each other. We realise more perfectly and easily the great idea, the tragic conception, when we are familiarised with its effects on the minds of little people,—with the petty consequences which it causes, as well as with the enormous forces from which it comes.

The catastrophe of Samson Agonistes discloses Milton's imperfect mastery of this element of effect. If ever there was an occasion which admitted its perfect employment, it was this. The kind of catastrophe is exactly that which is sure to strike and strike forcibly the minds of common persons. If their observations on the occasion were really given to us, we could scarcely avoid something rather comic. The eccentricity, so to speak, of ordinary persons, shows itself peculiarly at such times, and they say the queerest things. Shakespeare has exemplified this principle most skilfully on various occasions: it is the sort of art which is just in his way. His imagination always seems to be floating between the contrasts of things; and if his mind had a resting-place that it liked, it was this ordinary view of extraordinary events. Milton was under the greater obligation to use this relieving principle of art in the catastrophe of Samson, because he has made every effort to heighten the strictly tragic element, which requires that relief. His art, always serious, was never more serious. His Samson is

not the incarnation of physical strength which the popular fancy embodies in the character; nor is it the simple and romantic character of the Old Testament. On the contrary, Samson has become a Puritan: the observations he makes would have done much credit to a religious pikeman in Cromwell's army. In consequence, his death requires some lightening touches to make it a properly artistic event. The pomp of seriousness becomes too oppressive.

'At length, for intermission sake, they led him
Between the pillars; he his guide requested
(For so from such as nearer stood we heard)
As over-tired, to let him lean a while
With both his arms on those two massy pillars
That to the arched roof gave main support.
He unsuspicious led him; which when Samson
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclined,
And eyes fast fix'd, he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revolved:
At last with head erect thus cry'd aloud;—
"Hitherto, lords, what your commands imposed
I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,
Not without wonder or delight beheld:
Now of my own accord such other trial
I mean to show you of my strength yet greater,
As with amaze shall strike all who behold."
This utter'd, straining all his nerves, he bow'd,
As with the force of winds and waters pent
When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro
He tugg'd, he shook, till down they came, and drew
The whole roof after them with burst of thunder
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,—
Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, or priests,
Their choice nobility and flower, not only
Of this, but each Philistian city round,
Met from all parts to solemnise this feast.
Samson, with these immix'd, inevitably
Pull'd down the same destruction on himself;
The vulgar only 'scaped, who stood without.
Chor. O dearly-bought revenge, yet glorious!
Living or dying thou hast fulfill'd

The work for which thou wast foretold
To Israel, and now ly'st victorious
Among thy slain self-kill'd ;
Not willingly, but tangled in the fold
Of dire Necessity, whose law in death conjoin'd
Thee with thy slaughter'd foes, in number more
Than all thy life hath slain before.' [1]

This is grave and fine ; but Shakespeare would have done it differently and better.

We need not pause to observe how certainly this deficiency in humour and in the delineation of ordinary human feeling is connected with a recluse, a solitary, and to some extent an unsympathising life. If we combine a certain aloofness from common men with literary habits and an incessantly studious musing, we shall at once see how powerful a force is brought to bear on an instinctively austere character, and how sure it will be to develop the peculiar tendencies of it, both good and evil. It was to no purpose that Milton seems to have practised a sort of professional study of life. No man could rank more highly the importance to a poet of an intellectual insight into all-important pursuits and 'seemly arts.' But it is not by the mere intellect that we can take in the daily occupations of mankind ; we must sympathise with them, and see them in their human relations. A chimney-sweeper, *quâ* chimney-sweeper, is not very sentimental ; it is in himself that he is so interesting.

Milton's austere character is in some sort the more evident, because he possessed in large measure a certain relieving element, in which those who are eminent in that character are very deficient. Generally such persons have but obtuse senses. We are prone to attribute the purity of their conduct to the dullness of their sensations. Milton had no such

[1] *Samson Agonistes* : l. 1629.

obtuseness. He had every opportunity for knowing the world of eye and ear. You cannot open his works without seeing how much he did know of it. The austerity of his nature was not caused by the deficiency of his senses, but by an excess of the warning instinct. Even when he professed to delineate the world of sensuous delight, this instinct shows itself. Dr. Johnson thought he could discern melancholy in *L'Allegro*.[1] If he had said solitariness, it would have been correct.

The peculiar nature of Milton's character is very conspicuous in the events of his domestic life, and in the views which he took of the great public revolutions of his age. We can spare only a very brief space for the examination of either of these; but we will endeavour to say a few words upon each of them.

The circumstances of Milton's first marriage are as singular as any in the strange series of the loves of the poets. The scene opens with an affair of business. Milton's father, as is well known, was a scrivener—a kind of professional money-lender, then well known in London; and, having been early connected with the vicinity of Oxford, continued afterwards to have pecuniary transactions of a certain nature with country gentlemen of that neighbourhood. In the course of these, he advanced £500 to a certain Mr. Richard Powell, a squire of fair landed estate, residing at Forest Hill, which is about four miles from the city of Oxford. The money was lent on the 11th of June 1627; and a few months afterwards Mr. Milton the elder gave £312 of it to his son the

[1] 'Both Mirth and Melancholy are solitary, silent inhabitants of the breast, that neither receive nor transmit communication. . . . Through these two poems [*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*] . . . the colours of the diction seem not sufficiently discriminated. . . . I am afraid that I always meet some melancholy in his mirth.'—*Lives of the Poets*: 'Milton.'

poet, who was then a youth at college, and made a formal memorandum of the same in the form then usual, which still exists. The debt was never wholly discharged; for in 1651 we find Milton declaring on oath that he had never received more than £180, 'in part satisfaction of his said just and principal debt, with damages for the same and his costs of suit.' Mr. Keightley supposes him to have 'taken many a ride over to Forest Hill' after he left Cambridge and was living at Horton, which is not very far distant; but of course this is only conjecture. We only know that about 1643 'he took,' as his nephew relates, 'a journey into the country, nobody about him certainly knowing the reason, or that it was more than a journey of recreation. After a month's stay he returns a married man, who set out a bachelor; his wife being Mary, the eldest daughter of Mr. Richard Powell, then a justice of the peace' for the county of Oxford.

The suddenness of the event is rather striking; but Philips was at the time one of Milton's pupils, and it is possible that some pains may have been taken to conceal the love-affair from the 'young gentlemen.' Still, as Philips was Milton's nephew, he was likely to hear such intelligence tolerably early; and as he does not seem to have done so, the *dénouement* was probably rather prompt. At any rate, he was certainly married at that time, and took his bride home to his house in Aldersgate Street; and there was feasting and gaiety according to the usual custom of such events. A few weeks after, the lady went home to her friends, in which there was of course nothing remarkable; but it is singular that when the natural limit of her visit at home was come, she absolutely refused to return to her husband. The grounds of so strange a resolution are very

difficult to ascertain. Political feeling ran very high : old Mr. Powell adhered to the side of the king, and Milton to that of the Parliament ; and this might be fancied to have caused an estrangement. But, on the other hand, these circumstances must have been well known three months before. Nothing had happened in that quarter of a year to change very materially the position of the two parties in the State.

Some other cause for Mrs. Milton's conduct must be looked for. She herself is said to have stated that she did not like her husband's ' spare diet and hard study.' No doubt, too, she found it dull in London ; she had probably always lived in the country, and must have been quite unaccustomed to the not very pleasant scene in which she found herself. Still, many young ladies have married schoolmasters, and many young ladies have gone from Oxfordshire to London ; and nevertheless no such dissolution of matrimonial harmony is known to have occurred.

The fact we believe to be that the bride took a dislike to her husband. We cannot but have a suspicion that she did not like him before marriage, and that pecuniary reasons had their influence. If, however, Mr. Powell exerted his paternal influence, it may be admitted that he had unusual considerations to advance in favour of the alliance he proposed. It is not every father whose creditors are handsome young gentlemen with fair incomes. Perhaps it seemed no extreme tyranny to press the young lady a little to do that which some others might have done without pressing. Still, all this is but hypothesis ; the evidence of the love-affairs of the time of King Charles I. is but meagre. But, whatever the feelings of Miss Powell may have been, those of Mrs. Milton

are exceedingly certain. She would not return to her husband; she did not answer his letters; and a messenger whom he sent to bring her back was handled rather roughly. Unquestionably, she was deeply to blame, by far the most to blame of the two. Whatever may be alleged against him, is as nothing compared with her offence in leaving him. To defend so startling a course, we must adopt views of divorce even more extreme than those which Milton was himself driven to inculcate; and whatever Mrs. Milton's practice may have been, it may be fairly conjectured that her principles were strictly orthodox. Yet, if she could be examined by a commission to the ghosts, she would probably have some palliating circumstances to allege in mitigation of judgment.

There were, perhaps, peculiarities in Milton's character which a young lady might not improperly dislike. The austere and ascetic character is of course far less agreeable to women than the sensuous and susceptible. The self-occupation, the pride, the abstraction of the former are to the female mind disagreeable; studious habits and unusual self-denial seem to it purposeless; lofty enthusiasm, public spirit, the solitary pursuit of an elevated ideal, are quite out of its way, they rest too little on the visible world to be intelligible, they are too little suggested by the daily occurrences of life to seem possible. The poet in search of an imaginary phantom has never been successful with women; there are innumerable proofs of that: the ascetic moralist is even less interesting. A character combined out of the two—and this to some extent was Milton's—is singularly likely to meet with painful failure; with a failure the more painful that it could never anticipate or explain it. Possibly he was

absorbed in an austere self-conscious excellence; it may never have occurred to him that a lady might prefer the trivial detail of daily happiness.

Milton's own view of the matter he has explained to us in his book on divorce; and it is a very odd one. His complaint was that his wife would not talk. What he wished in marriage was an 'intimate and speaking help;' he encountered a 'mute and spiritless mate.' One of his principal incitements to the 'pious necessity of divorcing' was an unusual deficiency in household conversation. A certain loquacity in their wives has been the complaint of various eminent men; but his domestic affliction was a different one. The 'ready and reviving associate,' whom he had hoped to have found, appeared to be a 'coinhabiting mischief,' who was sullen, and perhaps seemed bored and tired. And at times he is disposed to cast the blame of his misfortune on the uninstructive nature of youthful virtue. The 'soberest and best-governed men,' he says, are least practised in such affairs, are not very well aware that 'the bashful muteness' of a young lady 'may oft-times hide the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation;' and are rather in too great haste to light the nuptial torch: whereas those 'who have lived most loosely, by reason of their bold accustoming, prove most successful in their matches; because their wild affections, unsettling at will, have been as so many divorces to teach them experience.' And he rather wishes to infer that the virtuous man should, in case of mischance, have his resource of divorce likewise.

In truth, Milton's book on divorce—though only containing principles which he continued to believe long after he had any personal reasons for wishing to

do so—was clearly suggested at first by the unusual phenomena of his first marriage. His wife began by not speaking to him, and finished by running away from him. Accordingly, like most books which spring out of personal circumstances, his treatises on this subject have a frankness, and a mastery of detail, which others on the same topic sometimes want. He is remarkably free from one peculiarily of modern writers on such matters. Several considerate gentlemen are extremely anxious for the 'rights of women.' They think that women will benefit by removing the bulwarks which the misguided experience of ages has erected for their protection. A migratory system of domestic existence might suit Madame Dudevant,[1] and a few cases of singular exception; but we cannot fancy that it would be, after all, so much to the taste of most ladies as the present more permanent system.

We have some reminiscence of the stories of the wolf and the lamb, when we hear amiable men addressing a female auditory (in books, of course) on the advantages of a freer 'development.' We are perhaps wrong, but we cherish an indistinct suspicion that an indefinite extension of the power of selection would rather tend to the advantage of the sex which more usually chooses. But we have no occasion to avow such opinions now. Milton had no such modern views. He is frankly and honestly anxious for the rights of the man. Of the doctrine that divorce is only permitted for the help of wives, he exclaims: 'Palpably uxorious! who can be ignorant that woman was created for man, and not man for woman? What an injury is it after wedlock to be slighted! what to be contended with in point of house-rule who shall be the head; not for any parity

[1] George Sand.

of wisdom, for that were something reasonable, but out of a female pride! "I suffer not," saith St. Paul, "the woman to usurp authority over the man." If the Apostle could not suffer it,' he naturally remarks, 'into what mould is he mortified that can?' He had a sincere desire to preserve men from the society of unsocial and unsympathising women; and that was his principal idea.

His theory, to a certain extent, partakes of the same notion. The following passage contains a perspicuous exposition of it: 'Moses, Deut. xxiv. 1, established a grave and prudent law, full of moral equity, full of due consideration towards nature, that cannot be resisted, a law consenting with the wisest men and civilest nations; that when a man hath married a wife, if it come to pass that he cannot love her by reason of some displeasing natural quality or unfitness in her, let him write her a bill of divorce. The intent of which law undoubtedly was this, that if any good and peaceable man should discover some helpless disagreement or dislike, either of mind or body, whereby he could not cheerfully perform the duty of a husband without the perpetual dissembling of offence and disturbance to his spirit; rather than to live uncomfortably and unhappily both to himself and to his wife; rather than to continue undertaking a duty which he could not possibly discharge, he might dismiss her, whom he could not tolerably, and so not conscionably, retain. And this law the Spirit of God by the mouth of Solomon, Prov. xxx. 21, 23, testifies to be a good and a necessary law, by granting it that "a hated woman" (for so the Hebrew word signifies, rather than "odious," though it come all to one), that "a hated woman, when she is married, is a thing that the earth cannot bear."' And he complains that the civil law of modern states

interferes with the 'domestical prerogative of the husband.'

His notion would seem to have been that a husband was bound not to dismiss his wife, except for a reason really sufficient; such as a thoroughly incompatible temper, an incorrigible 'muteness,' and a desertion like that of Mrs. Milton. But he scarcely liked to admit that, in the use of this power, he should be subject to the correction of human tribunals. He thought that the circumstances of each case depended upon 'utterless facts;' and that it was practically impossible for a civil court to decide on a subject so delicate in its essence, and so imperceptible in its data. But though amiable men doubtless suffer much from the deficiencies of their wives, we should hardly like to entrust them, in their own cases, with a jurisdiction so prompt and summary.

We are far from being concerned, however, just now with the doctrine of divorce on its intrinsic merits: we were only intending to give such an account of Milton's opinions upon it as might serve to illustrate his character. We think we have shown that it is possible there may have been, in his domestic relations, a little overweening pride; a tendency to overrate the true extent of masculine rights, and to dwell on his wife's duty to be social towards him rather than on his duty to be social towards her,—to be rather sullen whenever she was not quite cheerful. Still, we are not defending a lady for leaving her husband for defects of such inferior magnitude. Few households would be kept together if the right of transition were exercised on such trifling occasions. We are but suggesting that she may share the excuse which our great satirist has suggested for another unreliable lady: 'My mother was an angel; but angels are not always *commodes à vivre*.'

This is not a pleasant part of our subject, and we must leave it. It is more agreeable to relate that on no occasion of his life was the substantial excellence of Milton's character more conclusively shown than in his conduct at the last stage of this curious transaction. After a very considerable interval, and after the publication of his book on divorce, Mrs. Milton showed a disposition to return to her husband; and, in spite of his theories, he received her with open arms. With great Christian patience he received her relations too. The Parliamentary party was then victorious; and old Mr. Powell, who had suffered very much in the cause of the king, lived until his death untroubled, and 'wholly to his devotion,' as we are informed, in the house of his son-in-law.

Of the other occurrences of Milton's domestic life we have left ourselves no room to speak; we must turn to our second source of illustration for his character,—his opinions on the great public events of his time. It may seem odd, but we believe that a man of austere character naturally tends *both* to an excessive party spirit and to an extreme isolation. Of course the circumstances which develop the one must be different from those which are necessary to call out the other: party spirit requires companionship; isolation, if we may be pardoned so original a remark, excludes it. But though, as we have shown, this species of character is prone to mental solitude, [tends to] an intellectual isolation where it is possible and as soon as it can, yet when invincible circumstances throw it into mental companionship, when it is driven into earnest association with earnest men on interesting topics, its zeal becomes excessive. Such a man's mind is at home only with its own enthusiasm; it is cooped up within the narrow

limits of its own ideas, and it can make no allowance for those who differ from or oppose them.

We may see something of this excessive party-zeal in Burke. No one's reasons are more philosophical; yet no one who acted with a party went farther in aid of it or was more violent in support of it. He forgot what could be said for the tenets of the enemy; his imagination made that enemy an abstract incarnation of his tenets. A man, too, who knows that he formed his opinions originally by a genuine and intellectual process, is but little aware of the undue energy those ideas may obtain from the concurrence of those around. Persons who first acquired their ideas at second-hand are more open to a knowledge of their own weakness, and better acquainted with the strange force which there is in the sympathy of others. The isolated mind, when it acts with the popular feeling, is apt to exaggerate that feeling for the most part by an almost inevitable consequence of the feelings which render it isolated. Milton is an example of this remark. In the commencement of the struggle between Charles I. and the Parliament, he sympathised strongly with the popular movement, and carried to what seems now a strange extreme his partisanship. No one could imagine that the first literary Englishman of his time could write the following passage on Charles I. :—

'Who can with patience hear this filthy, rascally Fool speak so irreverently of Persons eminent both in Greatness and Piety? Dare you compare King *David* with King *Charles*; a most Religious King and Prophet, with a Superstitious Prince, and who was but a Novice in the Christian Religion; a most prudent, wise Prince with a weak one;

a valiant Prince with a cowardly one; finally, a most just Prince with a most unjust one? Have you the impudence to commend his Chastity and Sobriety, who is known to have committed all manner of Leudness in company with his Confident the Duke of *Buckingham*? It were to no purpose to inquire into the private Actions of his Life, who publickly at Plays would embrace and kiss the Ladies. . . .'[1]

Whatever may be the faults of that ill-fated monarch—and they assuredly were not small—no one would now think this absurd invective to be even an excusable exaggeration. It misses the true mark altogether, and is the expression of a strongly imaginative mind, which has seen something that it did not like, and is unable in consequence to see anything that has any relation to it distinctly or correctly. But with the supremacy of the Long Parliament Milton's attachment to their cause ceased. No one has drawn a more unfavourable picture of the rule which they established. Years after their supremacy had passed away, and the restoration of the monarchy had covered with a new and strange scene the old actors and the old world, he thrust into a most unlikely part of his *History of England* the following attack on them :—

'But when once the superficiall zeal and popular fumes that acted their New Magistracy were cool'd and spent in them, strait every one betook himself (setting the Commonwealth behind, his privat ends before) to doe as his own profit or ambition ledd him. Then was justice delay'd, and soon after deni'd: spight and favour determin'd all: hence faction, thence treachery, both at home and in the field; ev'ry where wrong, and oppression: foull and horrid deeds committed daily, or maintain'd, in secret, or in open. Som

[1] *Defence of the People of England*, chap. iv.

who had bin call'd from shops and warehouses, without other merit, to sit in Supreme Councills and Committees as thir breeding was, fell to huckster the Commonwealth. Others did therafter as men could soothe and humour them best; so hee who would give most, or, under covert of hypocriticall zeale, insinuat basest, enjoy'd unworthily the rewards of lerning and fidelity; or escap'd the punishment of his crimes and misdeeds. Thir Votes and Ordinances, which men looked should have contain'd the repealing of bad laws, and the immediat constitution of better, resounded with nothing els, but new Impositions, Taxes, Excises; yeerly, monthly, weekly. Not to reckon the Offices, Gifts, and Preferments bestow'd and shar'd among themselves.' [1]

His dislike of this system of committees, and of the generally dull and unemphatic administration of the Commonwealth, attached him to the Puritan army and to Cromwell; but in the continuation of the passage we have referred to, he expresses, with something, let it be said, of a schoolmaster feeling, an unfavourable judgment on their career.

'For *Britan*, to speak a truth not oft'n spok'n, as it is a Land fruitful enough of men stout and courageous in warr, soe it is naturally not over-fertill of men able to govern justly and prudently in peace, trusting onely in thir Mother-wit; who consider not justly, that civility, prudence, love of the Publick good, more then of money or vaine honour, are to this soile in a manner outlandish; grow not here, but in mindes well implanted with solid and elaborat breeding, too impolitic els and rude, if not headstrong and intractable to the industry and vertue either of executing or understanding true Civill Government. Valiant indeed, and prosperous to win a field; but to know the end and reason of winning, unjudicious, and unwise: in good or bad succes, alike unteachable. For the Sun, which wee want, ripens wits as well as fruits; and as Wine and Oil are imported to us from abroad, soe must ripe understanding, and many Civill Vertues, be imported into our mindes from Foren Writings, and examples of best Ages; we shall els miscarry still, and com short in the attempts of any great

[1] *The History of Britain: that part especially now called England*: Introduction to book iii.

enterprize. Hence did thir Victories prove as fruitles, as thir Losses dang'rous; and left them still conq'ring under the same greevances, that Men suffer conquer'd: which was indeed unlikely to goe otherwise, unles Men more then vulgar bred up, as few of them were, in the knowledg of antient and illustrious deeds, invincible against many and vaine Titles, impartial to Freindships and Relations, had conducted thir Affairs: but then from the Chapman to the Retailer, many whose ignorance was more audacious then the rest, were admitted with all thir sordid Rudiments to bear no meane sway among them, both in Church and State.'

We need not speak of Milton's disapprobation of the Restoration. Between him and the world of Charles II. the opposition was inevitable and infinite. Therefore the general fact remains that, except in the early struggles, when he exaggerated the popular feeling, he remained solitary in opinion, and had very little sympathy with any of the prevailing parties of his time.

Milton's own theory of government is to be learned from his works. He advocated a free commonwealth, without rule of a single person, or House of Lords: but the form of his projected commonwealth was peculiar. He thought that a certain perpetual council, which should be elected by the nation once for all, and the number of which should be filled up as vacancies might occur, was the best possible machine of government. He did not confine his admiration to abstract theory, but proposed the immediate establishment of such a council in this country. We need not go into an elaborate discussion to show the errors of this conclusion. Hardly any one, then or since, has probably adopted it.

The interest of the theoretical parts of Milton's political works is entirely historical. The tenets advocated are not of great value, and the arguments by which he supports them are perhaps of less;

but their relation to the times in which they were written gives them a very singular interest. The time of the Commonwealth was the only period in English history in which the fundamental questions of government have been thrown open for popular discussion in this country. We read in French literature discussions on the advisability of establishing a monarchy, on the advisability of establishing a republic, on the advisability of establishing an empire; and, before we proceed to examine the arguments, we cannot help being struck at the strange contrast which this multiplicity of open questions presents to our own uninquiring acquiescence in the hereditary polity which has descended to us. 'King, Lords, and Commons' are, we think, ordinances of nature. Yet Milton's political writings embody the reflections of a period when, for a few years, the government of England was nearly as much a subject of fundamental discussion as that of France was in 1851. An 'invitation to thinkers,' to borrow the phrase of Neckar, was given by the circumstances of the time; and, with the habitual facility of philosophical speculation, it was accepted, and used to the utmost.

Such are not the kind of speculations in which we expect assistance from Milton. It is not in its transactions with others, in its dealings with the manifold world, that the isolated and austere mind shows itself to the most advantage. Its strength lies in itself. It has 'a calm and pleasing solitariness.' It hears thoughts which others cannot hear. It enjoys the quiet and still air of delightful studies; and is ever conscious of such musing and poetry 'as is not to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her twin daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with

all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His Seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar.'

> 'Descend from Heav'n, Urania, by that name
> If rightly thou art call'd, whose voice divine
> Following, above th' Olympian hill I soar,
> Above the flight of Pegaséan wing.
> The meaning, not the name, I call; for thou
> Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
> Of old Olympus dwell'st, but heav'nly born:
> Before the hills appear'd, or fountain flow'd,
> Thou with eternal Wisdom didst converse,
> Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
> In presence of th' Almighty Father, pleased
> With thy celestial song. Up led by thee
> Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presumed,
> An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
> Thy temp'ring. With like safety guided down,
> Return me to my native element;
> Lest from this flying steed, unrein'd (as once
> Bellerophon, though from a lower clime),
> Dismounted, on th' Aleian field I fall
> Erroneous there to wander and forlorn.
> Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
> Within the visible diurnal sphere;
> Standing on earth, not rapt above the pole,
> More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
> To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,
> On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
> In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round
> And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
> Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn
> Purples the east: still govern thou my song,
> Urania, and fit audience find, though few;
> But drive far off the barb'rous dissonance
> Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
> Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
> In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears
> To rapture, till the savage clamour drown'd
> Both harp and voice; nor could the Muse defend
> Her son. So fail not thou, who thee implores;
> For thou art heav'nly, she an empty dream.'[1]

'An ancient clergyman of Dorsetshire, Dr. Wright, found John Milton in a small chamber hung with

[1] *Paradise Lost*, book vii. l. i.

rusty green, sitting in an elbow-chair, and dressed neatly in black: pale, but not cadaverous.' 'He used also to sit in a grey coarse cloth coat at the door of his house near Bunhill Fields in warm, sunny weather;'[1] and the common people said he was inspired.

If from the man we turn to his works, we are struck at once with two singular contrasts. The first of them is this. The distinction between ancient and modern art is sometimes said, and perhaps truly, to consist in the simple bareness of the imaginative conceptions which we find in ancient art, and the comparatively complex clothing in which all modern creations are embodied. If we adopt this distinction, Milton seems in some sort ancient, and in some sort modern. Nothing is so simple as the subject-matter of his works. The two greatest of his creations — the character of Satan and the character of Eve—are two of the simplest—the latter probably the very simplest—in the whole field of literature. On this side Milton's art is classical. On the other hand, in no writer is the imagery more profuse, the illustration more various, the dress altogether more splendid. And in this respect the style of his art seems romantic and modern. In real truth, however, it is only ancient art in a modern disguise. The dress is a mere dress, and can be stripped off when we will. We all of us do perhaps in memory strip it off for ourselves.

Notwithstanding the lavish adornments with which her image is presented, the character of Eve is still the simplest sort of feminine essence—the pure embodiment of that inner nature which we believe and hope that women have. The character of Satan, though it is not so easily described, has nearly

[1] Richardson. [F.M.]

as few elements in it. The most purely modern conceptions will not bear to be unclothed in this matter. Their romantic garment clings inseparably to them. Hamlet [and] Lear are not to be thought of except as complex characters, with very involved and complicated embodiments. They are as difficult to draw out in words as the common characters of life are; that of Hamlet, perhaps, is more so. If we make it, as perhaps we should, the characteristic of modern and romantic art that it presents us with creations which we cannot think of or delineate except as very varied, and, so to say, circumstantial, we must not rank Milton among the masters of romantic art. And, without involving the subject in the troubled sea of an old controversy, we may say that the most striking of the poetical peculiarities of Milton is the bare simplicity of his ideas, and the rich abundance of his illustrations.

Another of his peculiarities is equally striking. There seems to be such a thing as second-hand poetry. Some poets, musing on the poetry of other men, have unconsciously shaped it into something of their own: the new conception is like the original, it would never probably have existed had not the original existed previously; still it is sufficiently different from the original to be a new thing, not a copy or a plagiarism; it is a creation, though, so to say, a suggested creation. Gray is as good an example as can be found of a poet whose works abound in this species of semi-original conceptions. Industrious critics track his best lines back, and find others like them which doubtless lingered near his fancy while he was writing them. The same critics have been equally busy with the works of Milton, and equally successful. They find traces of his reading in half his works; not, which any reader

could do, in overt similes and distinct illustrations, but also in the very texture of the thought and the expression. In many cases, doubtless, they discover more than he himself knew. A mind like his, which has an immense store of imaginative recollections, can never know which of his own imaginations is exactly suggested by which recollection. Men awake with their best ideas; it is seldom worth while to investigate very curiously whence they came. Our proper business is to adapt, and mould, and act upon them. Of poets perhaps this is true even more remarkably than of other men; their ideas are suggested in modes, and according to laws even more impossible to specify than the ideas of the rest of the world.

Second-hand poetry, so to say, often seems quite original to the poet himself; he frequently does not know that he derived it from an old memory; years afterwards it may strike him as it does others. Still, in general, such inferior species of creation is not so likely to be found in minds of singular originality as in those of less. A brooding, placid, cultivated mind like that of Gray, is the place where we should expect to meet with it. Great originality disturbs the adaptive process, removes the mind of the poet from the thoughts of other men, and occupies it with its own heated and flashing thoughts. Poetry of the second degree is like the secondary rocks of modern geology—a still, gentle, alluvial formation; the igneous glow of primary genius brings forth ideas life the primeval granite, simple, astounding, and alone. Milton's case is an exception to this rule. His mind has marked originality, probably as much of it as any in literature; but it has as much of moulded recollection as any mind too. His poetry in consequence is like an artificial park, green, and

soft, and beautiful, yet with outlines bold, distinct, and firm, and the eternal rock ever jutting out; or, better still, it is like our own Lake scenery, where Nature has herself the same combination—where we have Rydal Water side by side with the everlasting upheaved mountain. Milton has the same union of softened beauty with unimpaired grandeur; and it is his peculiarity.

These are the two contrasts which puzzle us at first in Milton, and which distinguish him from other poets in our remembrance afterwards. We have a superficial complexity in illustration, and imagery, and metaphor; and in contrast with it we observe a latent simplicity of idea, an almost rude strength of conception. The underlying thoughts are few, though the flowers on the surface are so many. We have likewise the perpetual contrast of the soft poetry of the memory, and the firm, as it were fused, and glowing poetry of the imagination. His words, we may half fancifully say, are like his character. There is the same austerity in the real essence, the same exquisiteness of sense, the same delicacy of form which we know that he had, the same music which we imagine there was in his voice. In both his character and his poetry there was an ascetic nature in a sheath of beauty.

No book perhaps which has ever been written is more difficult to criticise than *Paradise Lost*. The only way to criticise a work of the imagination, is to describe its effect upon the mind of the reader—at any rate, of the critic; and this can only be adequately delineated by strong illustrations, apt similes, and perhaps a little exaggeration. The task is in its very nature not an easy one; the poet paints a picture on the fancy of the critic, and the critic has in some sort to copy it on the paper. He

must say what it is before he can make remarks upon it. But in the case of *Paradise Lost* we hardly like to use illustrations. The subject is one which the imagination rather shrinks from. At any rate it requires courage, and an effort to compel the mind to view such a subject as distinctly and vividly as it views other subjects. Another peculiarity of *Paradise Lost* makes the difficulty even greater. It does not profess to be a mere work of art; or rather, it claims to be by no means that, and that only. It starts with a dogmatic aim; it avowedly intends to

> 'assert eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to man.'

In this point of view we have always had a sympathy with the Cambridge mathematician who has been so much abused. He said, 'After all, *Paradise Lost proves* nothing;' and various persons of poetical tastes and temperament have been very severe on the prosaic observation. Yet, 'after all,' he was right. Milton professed to prove something. He was too profound a critic—rather, he had too profound an instinct of those eternal principles of art which criticism tries to state—not to know that on such a subject he must prove something. He professed to deal with the great problem of human destiny; to show why man was created, in what kind of universe he lives, whence he came, and whither he goes. He dealt of necessity with the greatest of subjects. He had to sketch the greatest of objects. He was concerned with infinity and eternity even more than with time and sense; he undertook to delineate the ways, and consequently the character of Providence, as well as the conduct and the tendencies of man. The essence of success in such an attempt is to satisfy the religious sense of man; to bring home

to our hearts what we know to be true; to teach us what we have not seen; to awaken us to what we have forgotten; to remove the 'covering' from all people, and the 'veil' that is spread over all nations; to give us, in a word, such a conception of things divine and human as we can accept, believe and trust. The true doctrine of criticism demands what Milton invites—an examination of the degree in which the great epic attains this aim. And if, in examining it, we find it necessary to use unusual illustrations, and plainer words than are customary, it must be our excuse that we do not think the subject can be made clear without them.

The defect of *Paradise Lost* is that, after all, it is founded on a *political* transaction. The scene is in heaven very early in the history of the universe, before the creation of man or the fall of Satan. We have a description of a court.[1] The angels,

> 'By imperial summons called,'

appear

> 'Under their hierarchs in orders bright:
> Ten thousand thousand ensigns high advanced,
> Standards and gonfalons 'twixt van and rear
> Stream in the air, and for distinction serve
> Of hierarchies, and orders, and degrees.'

To this assemblage 'th' Omnipotent' speaks:—

> 'Hear, all ye Angels, progeny of light,
> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Pow'rs,
> Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand:
> This day I have begot whom I declare
> My only Son; and on this holy hill
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
> And by myself have sworn, to him shall bow

[1] Book v. ll. 510–615.

All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord :
Under his great vicegerent reign abide
United as one individual soul
For ever happy. Him who disobeys,
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day,
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Int' utter darkness, deep ingulph'd, his place
Ordain'd without redemption, without end.'

This act of patronage was not popular at court ; and why should it have been ? The religious sense is against it. The worship which sinful men owe to God is not transferable to lieutenants and vicegerents. The whole scene of the court jars upon a true feeling. We seem to be reading about some emperor of history, who admits his son to a share in the empire, who confers on him a considerable jurisdiction, and requires officials, with 'standards and gonfalons,' to bow before him. The orthodoxy of Milton is quite as questionable as his accuracy. The old Athanasian creed was not made by persons who would allow such a picture as that of Milton to stand before their imaginations. The generation of the Son was to them a fact ' before all time ; ' an eternal fact. There was no question in their minds of patronage or promotion. The Son was the Son before all time, just as the Father was the Father before all time. Milton had in such matters a bold but not very sensitive imagination. He accepted the inevitable materialism of biblical, and, to some extent, of all religious language as distinct revelation. He certainly believed, in contradiction to the old creed, that God had both ' parts and passions.' He imagined that earth is

' but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein
Each to other like more than on Earth is thought ! ' [1]

[1] Book v. l. 575.

From some passages it would seem that he actually thought of God as having 'the members and form' of a man. Naturally, therefore, he would have no toleration for the mysterious notions of time and eternity which are involved in the traditional doctrine. We are not, however, now concerned with Milton's belief, but with his representation of his creed—his picture, so to say, of it in *Paradise Lost*; still, as we cannot but think, that picture is almost irreligious, and certainly different from that which has been generally accepted in Christendom. Such phrases as 'before all time,' 'eternal generation,' are doubtless very vaguely interpreted by the mass of men; nevertheless, no sensitively orthodox man *could* have drawn the picture of a generation, not to say an exaltation, *in* time.

We shall see this more clearly by reading what follows in the poem :—

'All seemed well pleased; all seemed, but were not all.'

One of the archangels, whose name can be guessed, decidedly disapproved, and calls a meeting, at which he explains that

'orders and degrees
Jar not with liberty, but well consist;'

but still, that the promotion of a new person, on grounds of relationship merely, above, even infinitely above, the old angels, with imperial titles, was 'a new law,' and rather tyrannical. Abdiel,

'than whom none with more zeal adored
The Deity, and with divine commands obeyed,'

attempts a defence :

'Grant it thee unjust
That equal over equals monarch reign—

Thyself, though great and glorious, dost thou count,
Or all angelic nature join'd in one,
Equal to him, begotten Son, by whom,
As by his Word, the mighty Father made
All things, ev'n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav'n
By him created in their bright degrees,
Crown'd them with glory, and to their glory named
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Pow'rs?—
Essential Pow'rs; nor by his reign obscured,
But more illustrious made; since he the head,
One of our number thus reduced becomes;
His laws our laws; all honour to him done
Returns our own. Cease, then, this impious rage,
And tempt not these; but hasten to appease
Th' incensed Father and th' incensed Son,
While pardon may be found, in time besought.'

Yet though Abdiel's intentions were undeniably good, his argument is rather specious. Acting as an instrument in the process of creation would scarcely give a valid claim to the obedience of the created being. Power may be shown in the act, no doubt; but mere power gives no true claim to the obedience of moral beings. It is a kind of principle of all manner of idolatries and false religions to believe that it does so. Satan, besides, takes issue on the fact:

'That we were formed, then, say'st thou? and the work
Of secondary hands, by task transferr'd
From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!
Doctrine which we would know whence learned.'

And we must say that the speech in which the new ruler is introduced to the 'thrones, dominations, princedoms, powers,' is hard to reconcile with Abdiel's exposition. '*This day*' he seems to have come into existence, and could hardly have assisted at the creation of the angels, who are not young, and who converse with one another like old acquaintances.

We have gone into this part of the subject at

length, because it is the source of the great error which pervades *Paradise Lost*. Satan is made *interesting*. This has been the charge of a thousand orthodox and even heterodox writers against Milton. Shelley, on the other hand, has gloried in it; and fancied, if we remember rightly, that Milton intentionally ranged himself on the Satanic side of the universe, just as Shelley himself would have done, and that he wished to show the falsity of the ordinary theology. But Milton was born an age too early for such aims, and was far too sincere to have advocated any doctrine in a form so indirect. He believed every word he said. He was not conscious of the effect his teaching would produce in an age like this, when scepticism is in the air, and when it is not possible to help looking coolly on his delineations.

Probably in our boyhood we can recollect a period when any solemn description of celestial events would have commanded our respect; we should not have dared to read it intelligently, to canvass its details and see what it meant: it was a religious book; it sounded reverential, and that would have sufficed. Something like this was the state of mind of the seventeenth century. Even Milton probably shared in a vague reverence for religious language. He hardly felt the moral effect of the pictures he was drawing. His artistic instinct, too, often hurries him away. His Satan was to him, as to us, the hero of his poem. Having commenced by making him resist on an occasion which in an earthly kingdom would have been excusable and proper, he probably a little sympathised with him, just as his readers do.

The interest of Satan's character is at its height in the first two books. Coleridge justly compared

it to that of Napoleon. There is the same pride, the same Satanic ability, the same will, the same egotism. His character seems to grow with his position. He is far finer after his fall, in misery and suffering, with scarcely any resource except in himself, than he was originally in heaven; at least, if Raphael's description of him can be trusted. No portrait which imagination or history has drawn of a revolutionary anarch is nearly so perfect; there is all the grandeur of the greatest human mind, and a certain infinitude in his circumstances which humanity must ever want.

Few Englishmen feel a profound reverence for Napoleon I. There was no French alliance in *his* time; we have most of us some tradition of antipathy to him. Yet hardly any Englishman can read the account of the campaign of 1814 without feeling his interest for the emperor to be strong, and without perhaps being conscious of a latent wish that he may succeed. Our opinion is against him, our serious wish is of course for England; but the imagination has a sympathy of its own, and will not give place. We read about the great general—never greater than in that last emergency—showing resources of genius that seem almost infinite, and that assuredly have never been surpassed, yet vanquished, yielding to the power of circumstances, to the combined force of adversaries, each of whom singly he outmatches in strength, and all of whom together he surpasses in majesty and in mind. Something of the same sort of interest belongs to the Satan of the first two books of *Paradise Lost*. We know that he will be vanquished; his name is not a recommendation. Still we do not imagine distinctly the minds by which he is to be vanquished; we do not take

the same interest in them that we do in him ; our sympathies, our fancy, are on his side.

Perhaps much of this was inevitable ; yet what a defect it is ! especially what a defect in Milton's own view, and looked at with the stern realism with which he regarded it ! Suppose that the author of evil in the universe were the most attractive being in it ; suppose that the source of all sin were the origin of all interest to us ! We need not dwell upon this.

As we have said, much of this was difficult to avoid, if indeed it could be avoided, in dealing with such a theme. Even Milton shrank, in some measure, from delineating the Divine character. His imagination evidently halts when it is required to perform that task. The more delicate imagination of our modern world would shrink still more. Any person who will consider what such an attempt must end in, will find his nerves quiver. But by a curiously fatal error, Milton has selected for delineation exactly that part of the Divine nature which is most beyond the reach of the human faculties, and which is also, when we try to describe our fancy of it, the least effective to our minds. He has made God *argue*. Now the procedure of the Divine mind from truth to truth must ever be incomprehensible to us ; the notion, indeed, of His proceeding at all, is a contradiction : to some extent, at least, it is inevitable that we should use such language, but we know it is in reality inapplicable. A long train of reasoning in such a connection is so out of place as to be painful ; and yet Milton has many. He relates a series of family prayers in heaven, with sermons afterwards, which are very tedious. Even Pope was shocked at the notion of Providence talking like ' a school-

divine.'[1] And there is the still worse error that, if you once attribute reasoning to Him, subsequent logicians may discover that He does not reason very well.

Another way in which Milton has contrived to strengthen our interest in Satan is the number and insipidity of the good angels. There are old rules as to the necessity of a supernatural machinery for an epic poem, worth some fraction of the paper on which they are written, and derived from the practice of Homer, who believed his gods and goddesses to be real beings, and would have been rather harsh with a critic who called them machinery. These rules had probably an influence with Milton, and induced him to manipulate these serious angels more than he would have done otherwise. They appear to be excellent administrators with very little to do; a kind of grand chamberlains with wings, who fly down to earth and communicate information to Adam and Eve. They have no character; they are essentially messengers, merely conductors, so to say, of the providential will: no one fancies that they have an independent power of action; they seem scarcely to have minds of their own. No effect can be more unfortunate. If the struggle of Satan had been with Deity directly, the natural instincts of religion would have been awakened; but when an angel with mind is only contrasted to angels with wings, we sympathise with the former.

In the first two books, therefore, our sympathy with Milton's Satan is great; we had almost said unqualified. The speeches he delivers are of well-known excellence. Lord Brougham, no con-

[1] 'In quibbles angel and archangel join,
And God the Father turns a school divine.'
—Imitation of Horace's Epistle to Augustus.

temptible judge of emphatic oratory, has laid down that, if a person had not an opportunity of access to the great Attic masterpieces, he had better choose these for a model. What is to be regretted about the orator is that he scarcely acts up to his sentiments. 'Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven,' is, at any rate, an audacious declaration. But he has no room for exhibiting similar audacity in action. His offensive career is limited. In the nature of the subject there was scarcely the possibility for the fallen archangel to display in the detail of his operations the surpassing intellect with which Milton has endowed him. He goes across chaos, gets into a few physical difficulties; but these are not much. His grand aim is the conquest of our first parents; and we are at once struck with the enormous inequality of the conflict. Two beings just created, without experience, without guile, without knowledge of good and evil, are expected to contend with a being on the delineation of whose powers every resource of art and imagination, every subtle suggestion, every emphatic simile has been lavished. The idea in every reader's mind is, and must be, not surprise that our first parents should yield, but wonder that Satan should not think it beneath him to attack them. It is as if an army should invest a cottage.

We have spoken more of theology than we intended; and we need not say how much the monstrous inequalities attributed to the combatants affect our estimate of the results of the conflict. The state of man is what it is, because the defenceless Adam and Eve of Milton's imagination yielded to the nearly all-powerful Satan whom he has delineated. Milton has in some sense invented this difficulty; for in the book of Genesis there is no

such inequality. The serpent may be subtler than any beast of the field; but he is not necessarily subtler or cleverer than man. So far from Milton having justified the ways of God to man, he has loaded the common theology with a new encumbrance.

We may need refreshment after this discussion; and we cannot find it better than in reading a few remarks of Eve.

> 'That day I oft remember, when from sleep
> I first awaked, and found myself reposed,
> Under a shade, on flow'rs, much wond'ring where
> And what I was, whence hither brought, and how.
> Not distant far from thence a murm'ring sound
> Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
> Into a liquid plain; then stood unmoved,
> Pure as th' expanse of Heav'n. I thither went
> With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
> On the green bank, to look into the clear,
> Smooth lake, that to me seem'd another sky.
> As I bent down to look, just opposite
> A shape within the watery gleam appear'd,
> Bending to look on me. I started back,
> It started back; but pleased I soon return'd,
> Pleased it return'd as soon with answ'ring looks
> Of sympathy and love. There I had fix'd
> Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
> Had not a voice thus warn'd me: "What thou seest,
> What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself;
> With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
> And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
> Thy coming, and thy soft embraces—he
> Whose image thou art; him thou shalt enjoy
> Inseparably thine: to him shalt bear
> Multitudes like thyself, and thence be call'd
> Mother of Human Race." What could I do
> But follow straight, invisibly thus led?
> Till I espy'd thee, fair, indeed, and tall,
> Under a platan; yet methought less fair,
> Less winning soft, less amiably mild,
> Than that smooth wat'ry image. Back I turn'd:
> Thou, following, cry'dst aloud, "Return, fair Eve;
> Whom fly'st thou?" '[1]

[1] Book iv. ll. 449–482.

Eve's character, indeed, is one of the most wonderful efforts of the human imagination. She is a kind of abstract woman ; essentially a typical being ; an official ' mother of all living.' Yet she is a real interesting woman, not only full of delicacy and sweetness, but with all the undefinable fascination, the charm of personality, which such typical characters hardly ever have. By what consummate miracle of wit this charm of individuality is preserved, without impairing the general idea which is ever present to us, we cannot explain, for we do not know.

Adam is far less successful. He has good hair,— ' hyacinthine locks ' that ' from his parted forelock manly hung ; ' a ' fair large front ' and ' eye sublime ; ' but he has little else that we care for. There is, in truth, no opportunity of displaying manly virtues, even if he possessed them. He has only to yield to his wife's solicitations, which he does. Nor are we sure that he does it well. He is very tedious ; he indulges in sermons which are good ; but most men cannot but fear that so delightful a being as Eve must have found him tiresome. She steps away, however, and goes to sleep at some of the worst points.

Dr. Johnson remarked that, after all, *Paradise Lost* was one of the books which no one wished longer : [1] we fear, in this irreverent generation, some wish it shorter. Hardly any reader would be sorry if some portions of the later books had been spared him. Coleridge, indeed, discovered profound mysteries in the last ; but in what could not Coleridge

[1] ' *Paradise Lost* is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. None ever wished it longer than it is. Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure. . . .'—*Lives of the Poets* : ' Milton.'

find a mystery if he wished? Dryden more wisely remarked that Milton became tedious when he entered upon a 'tract of Scripture.'[1] Nor is it surprising that such is the case.

The style of many parts of Scripture is such that it will not bear addition or subtraction. A word less, or an idea more, and the effect upon the mind is the same no longer. Nothing can be more tiresome than a sermonic amplification of such passages. It is almost too much when, as from the pulpit, a paraphrastic commentary is prepared for our spiritual improvement. In deference to the intention, we bear it, but we bear it unwillingly; and we cannot endure it at all when, as in poems, the object is to awaken our fancy rather than to improve our conduct. The account of the creation in the book of Genesis is one of the compositions from which no sensitive imagination would subtract an iota, to which it could not bear to add a word. Milton's paraphrase is alike copious and ineffective. The universe is, in railway phrase, 'opened,' but not created; no green earth springs in a moment from the indefinite void. Instead, too, of the simple loneliness of the Old Testament, several angelic officials are in attendance, who help in nothing, but indicate that heaven must be plentifully supplied with tame creatures.

There is no difficulty in writing such criticisms, and, indeed, other unfavourable criticisms on *Paradise Lost*. There is scarcely any book in the world which is open to a greater number, or which a reader who allows plain words to produce a due effect will be less satisfied with. Yet what book is really greater? In the best parts the words have a magic in them; even in the inferior passages you are hardly sensible of their inferiority till you translate them

[1] 'Essay on Satire.' [F.M.]

into your own language. Perhaps no style ever written by man expressed so adequately the conceptions of a mind so strong and so peculiar; a manly strength, a haunting atmosphere of enhancing suggestions, a firm continuous music, are only some of its excellences. To comprehend the whole of the others, you must take the volume down and read it,—the best defence of Milton, as has been said most truly, against all objections.

Probably no book shows the transition which our theology has made since the middle of the seventeenth century, at once so plainly and so fully. We do not now compose long narratives to 'justify the ways of God to man.' The more orthodox we are, the more we shrink from it; the more we hesitate at such a task, the more we allege that we have no powers for it. Our most celebrated defences of established tenets are in the style of Butler, not in that of Milton. They do not profess to show a satisfactory explanation of human destiny; on the contrary, they hint that probably we could not understand such an explanation if it were given us; at any rate, they allow that it is not given us. Their course is palliative. They suggest an 'analogy of difficulties.' If our minds were greater, so they reason, we should comprehend these doctrines: now we cannot explain analogous facts which we see and know. No style can be more opposite to the bold argument, the boastful exposition of Milton. The teaching of the eighteenth century is in the very atmosphere we breathe. We read it in the teachings of Oxford; we hear it from the missionaries of the Vatican. The air of the theology is clarified. We know our difficulties, at least; we are rather prone to exaggerate the weight of some than to deny the reality of any.

We cannot continue a line of thought which would draw us on too far for the patience of our readers. We must, however, make one more remark, and we shall have finished our criticism on *Paradise Lost*. It is analogous to that which we have just made. The scheme of the poem is based on an offence against positive morality. The offence of Adam was not against nature or conscience, not against anything of which we can see the reason, or conceive the obligation, but against an unexplained injunction of the Supreme Will. The rebellion in heaven, as Milton describes it, was a rebellion, not against known ethics, or immutable spiritual laws, but against an arbitrary selection and an unexplained edict. We do not say that there is no such thing as positive morality: we do not think so; even if we did, we should not insert a proposition so startling at the conclusion of a literary criticism. But we are sure that, wherever a positive moral edict is promulgated, it is no subject, except perhaps under a very peculiar treatment, for literary art. By the very nature of it, it cannot satisfy the heart and conscience. It is a difficulty; we need not attempt to explain it away. There are mysteries enough which will never be explained away. But it is contrary to every principle of criticism to state the difficulty as if it were not one; to bring forward the puzzle, yet leave it to itself; to publish so strange a problem, and give only an untrue solution of it: and yet such, in its bare statement, is all which Milton has done.

Of Milton's other writings we have left ourselves no room to speak; and though every one of them, or almost every one of them, would well repay a careful criticism, yet few of them seem to throw much additional light on his character, or add much

to our essential notion of his genius, though they may exemplify and enhance it. *Comus* is the poem which does so the most. Literature has become so much lighter than it used to be, that we can scarcely realise the position it occupied in the light literature of our forefathers. We have now in our own language many poems that are pleasanter in their subject, more graceful in their execution, more flowing in their outline, more easy to read.

Dr. Johnson, though perhaps no very excellent authority on the more intangible graces of literature, was disposed to deny to Milton the capacity of creating the lighter literature: 'Milton, madam, was a genius that could cut a colossus from a rock, but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones.' [1] And it would not be surprising if this generation, which has access to the almost indefinite quantity of lighter compositions which have been produced since Johnson's time, were to echo his sentence. In some degree, perhaps, the popular taste does so. *Comus* has no longer the peculiar exceptional popularity which it used to have. We can talk without general odium of its defects. Its characters are nothing, its sentiments are tedious, its story is not interesting. But it is only when we have realised the magnitude of its deficiencies that we comprehend the peculiarity of its greatness. Its power is in its style. A grave and firm music pervades it: it is soft, without a thought of weakness; harmonious and yet strong; impressive, as few such poems are, yet covered with a bloom of beauty and a complexity of charm that few poems have either. We have, perhaps, light literature in itself better, that we read oftener and more easily, that lingers more in our memories; but we have not any, we question if

[1] Boswell's *Life of Johnson*: 13th June 1784.

there ever will be any, which gives so true a conception of the capacity and the dignity of the mind by which it was produced. The breath of solemnity which hovers round the music attaches us to the writer. Every line, here as elsewhere, in Milton excites the idea of indefinite power.

And so we must draw to a close. The subject is an infinite one, and if we pursued it, we should lose ourselves in miscellaneous commentary, and run on far beyond the patience of our readers. What we have said has at least a defined intention. We have wished to state the impression which the character of Milton and the greatest of Milton's works are likely to produce on readers of the present generation—a generation, almost more than any other, different from his own.

ART IN ENGLISH POETRY.[1]

We couple these two books [2] together, not because of their likeness, for they are as dissimilar as books can be; nor on account of the eminence of their authors, for in general two great authors are too much for one essay; but because they are the best possible illustration of something we have to say upon poetical art—because they may give to it life and freshness. The accident of contemporaneous publication has here brought together two books very characteristic of modern art, and we want to show how they are characteristic.

Neither English poetry nor English criticism has ever recovered the *eruption* which they both made at the beginning of this century into the fashionable world. The poems of Lord Byron were received with an avidity that resembles our present avidity for sensation novels, and were read by a class which at present reads little but such novels. Old men who remember those days may be heard to say: 'We hear nothing of poetry nowadays; it seems quite down.' And 'down' it certainly is, if for poetry it be a descent to be no longer the favourite excitement of the more frivolous part of the 'upper' world. That stimulating poetry is now little read. A stray

[1] ['National Review: November 1864—No. I. New Series:—Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or, Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry.']

[2] *Enoch Arden, etc.* By Alfred Tennyson, D.C.L., Poet-Laureate. *Dramatis Personæ.* By Robert Browning.

schoolboy may still be detected in a wild admiration for the *Giaour* or the *Corsair* (and it is suitable to his age, and he should not be reproached for it), but the *real* posterity—the quiet students of a past literature—never read them or think of them. A line or two linger on the memory; a few telling strokes of occasional and felicitous energy are quoted, but this is all. As wholes, these exaggerated stories were worthless; they taught nothing, and therefore they are forgotten. If nowadays a dismal poet were, like Byron, to lament the fact of his birth, and to hint that he was too good for the world, the *Saturday Reviewers* would say that 'they doubted if he *was* too good; that a sulky poet was a questionable addition to a tolerable world; that he need not have been born, as far as they were concerned.'

Doubtless, there is much in Byron besides his dismal exaggeration, but it was that exaggeration which made 'the sensation' which gave him a wild moment of dangerous fame. As so often happens, the cause of his momentary fashion is the cause also of his lasting oblivion. Moore's former reputation was less excessive, yet it has not been more permanent. The prettiness of a few songs preserves the memory of his name, but as a poet to *read* he is forgotten. There is nothing to read in him; no exquisite thought, no sublime feeling, no consummate description of true character. Almost the sole result of the poetry of that time is the harm which it has done. It degraded for a time the whole character of the art. It said by practice, by a most efficient and successful practice, that it was the aim, the *duty* of poets, to catch the attention of the passing, the fashionable, the busy world. If a poem 'fell dead,' it was nothing; it was composed to please the 'London' of the year, and if that London did not

like it, why, it had failed. It fixed upon the minds of a whole generation, it engraved in popular memory and tradition, a vague conviction that poetry is but one of the many *amusements* for the light classes, for the lighter hours of all classes. The mere notion, the bare idea, that poetry is a deep thing, a teaching thing, the most surely and wisely elevating of human things, is even now to the coarse public mind nearly unknown.

As was the fate of poetry, so inevitably was that of criticism. The science that expounds which poetry is good and which is bad, is dependent for its popular reputation on the popular estimate of poetry itself. The critics of that day had *a* day, which is more than can be said for some since; they professed to tell the fashionable world in what books it would find new pleasure, and therefore they were read by the fashionable world. Byron counted the critic and poet equal. The *Edinburgh Review* penetrated among the young, and into places of female resort where it does not go now. As people ask, 'Have you read *Henry Dunbar*? and what do you think of it?' so they then asked, 'Have you read the *Giaour*? and what do you think of it?' Lord Jeffrey, a shrewd judge of the world, employed himself in telling it what to think; not so much what it ought to think, as what at bottom it did think, and so by dexterous sympathy with current society he gained contemporary fame and power. Such fame no critic must hope for now. His articles will not penetrate where the poems themselves do not penetrate. When poetry was noisy, criticism was loud; now poetry is a still small voice, and criticism must be smaller and stiller. As the function of such criticism was limited, so was its subject. For the great and (as time now proves) the *permanent*

part of the poetry of his time—for Shelley and for Wordsworth—Lord Jeffrey had but one word. He said, 'It won't do.'[1] And it will not do to amuse a drawing-room.

The doctrine that poetry is a light amusement for idle hours, a metrical species of sensational novel, has not indeed been without gainsayers wildly popular. Thirty years ago, Mr. Carlyle most rudely contradicted it. But perhaps this is about all that he has done. He has denied, but he has not disproved. He has contradicted the floating paganism, but he has not founded the deep religion. All about and around us a *faith* in poetry struggles to be extricated, but it is not extricated. Some day, at the touch of the true word, the whole confusion will by magic cease; the broken and shapeless notions [will] cohere and crystallise into a bright and true theory. But this cannot be yet.

But though no complete theory of the poetic art as yet be possible for us, though perhaps only our children's children will be able to speak on this subject with the assured confidence which belongs to accepted truth, yet something of some certainty may be stated on the easier elements, and something that will throw light on these two new books. But it will be necessary to assign reasons, and the assigning of reasons is a dry task. Years ago, when criticism only tried to show how poetry could be made a good amusement, it was not impossible that criticism itself should be amusing. But now it must at least be serious, for we believe that poetry is a serious and a deep thing.

There should be a word in the language of literary art to express what the word 'picturesque'

[1] The opening words in Lord Jeffrey's review of the *Excursion* were, 'This will never do.'

expresses for the fine arts. *Picturesque* means fit to be put into a picture ; we want a word *literatesque*, ' fit to be put into a book.' An artist goes through a hundred different country scenes, rich with beauties, charms, and merits, but he does not paint any of them. He leaves them alone ; he idles on till he finds the hundred-and-first—a scene which many observers would not think much of, but which *he* knows by virtue of his art will look well on canvas, and this he paints and preserves. Susceptible observers, though not artists, feel this quality too ; they say of a scene, ' How picturesque ! ' meaning by this a quality distinct from that of beauty, or sublimity, or grandeur—meaning to speak not only of the scene as it is in itself, but also of its fitness for imitation by art ; meaning not only that it is good, but that its goodness is such as ought to be transferred to paper ; meaning not simply that it fascinates, but also that its fascination is such as ought to be copied by man. A fine and insensible instinct has put language to this subtle use ; it expresses an idea without which fine-art criticism could not go on, and it is very natural that the language of pictorial art should be better supplied with words than that of literary criticism, for the eye was used before the mind, and language embodies primitive sensuous ideas, long ere it expresses, or need express, abstract and literary ones.

The reason why a landscape is ' picturesque ' is often said to be, that such landscape represents an ' idea.' But this explanation, though, in the minds of some who use it, it is near akin to the truth, fails to explain that truth to those who did not know it before ; the word ' idea ' is so often used in these subjects when people do not know

anything else to say ; it represents so often a kind of intellectual insolvency, when philosophers are at their wits' end, that shrewd people will never readily on any occasion give it credit for meaning anything. A wise explainer must, therefore, look out for other words to convey what he has to say. *Landscapes*, like everything else in nature, divide themselves as we look at them into a sort of rude classification. We go down a river, for example, and we see a hundred landscapes on both sides of it, resembling one another in much, yet differing in something ; with trees here, and a farmhouse there, and shadows on one side, and a deep pool far on ; a collection of circumstances most familiar in themselves, but making a perpetual novelty by the magic of their various combinations. We travel so for miles and hours, and then we come to a scene which also has these various circumstances and adjuncts, but which combines them best, which makes the best whole of them, which shows them in their best proportion at a single glance before the eye. Then we say : ' This is the place to paint the river ; this is the picturesque point ! '

Or, if not artists or critics of art, we feel without analysis or examination that somehow this bend or sweep of the river shall in future *be the river to us* : that it is the image of it which we will retain in our mind's eye, by which we will remember it, which we will call up when we want to describe or think of it. Some fine countries, some beautiful rivers, have not this picturesque quality : they give us elements of beauty, but they do not combine them together ; we go on for a time delighted, but *after* a time somehow we get wearied ; we feel that we are taking in nothing and learning nothing ; we get no collected image before our

mind; we see the accidents and circumstances of that sort of scenery, but the summary scene we do not see; we find *disjecta membra*, but no form; various and many and faulty approximations are displayed in succession; but the absolute perfection in that country's or river's scenery—its *type*—is withheld. We go away from such places in part delighted, but in part baffled; we have been puzzled by pretty things; we have beheld a hundred different inconsistent specimens of the same sort of beauty; but the rememberable idea, the full development, the characteristic individuality of it, we have not seen.

We find the same sort of quality in all parts of painting. We see a portrait of a person we know, and we say, 'It is like—yes, like, of course, but it is not *the man*;' we feel it could not be anyone else, but still, somehow it fails to bring home to us the individual as we know him to be. *He* is not there. An accumulation of features like his are painted, but his essence is not painted; an approximation more or less excellent is given, but the characteristic expression, the *typical* form, of the man is withheld.

Literature—the painting of words—has the same quality, but wants the analogous word. The word '*literatesque*' would mean, if we possessed it, that perfect combination in *subject-matter* of literature, which suits the *art* of literature. We often meet people, and say of them, sometimes meaning well and sometimes ill: 'How well so-and-so would do in a book!' Such people are by no means the best people; but they are the most effective people—the most rememberable people. Frequently, when we first know them, we like them because they explain to us so much of our

experience; we have known many people 'like that,' in one way or another, but we did not seem to understand them; they were nothing to us, for their traits were indistinct; we forgot them, for they *hitched* on to nothing, and we could not classify them. But when we see the *type* of the genus, at once we seem to comprehend its character; the inferior specimens are explained by the perfect embodiment; the approximations are definable when we know the ideal to which they draw near.

There are an infinite number of classes of human beings, but in each of these classes there is a distinctive type which, if we could expand it out in words, would define the class. We cannot expand it in formal terms any more than a landscape, or a species of landscapes; but we have an art, an art of words, which can draw it. Travellers and others often bring home, in addition to their long journals—which, though so living to them, are so dead, so inanimate, so undescriptive to all else—a pen-and-ink sketch, rudely done very likely, but which, perhaps, even the more for the blots and strokes, gives a distinct notion, an emphatic image, to all who see it. These say at once, *now* we know the sort of thing. The sketch has *hit* the mind. True literature does the same. It describes sorts, varieties, and permutations, by delineating the type of each sort, the ideal of each variety, the central, the marking trait of each permutation.

On this account, the greatest artists of the world have ever shown an enthusiasm for reality. To care for notions and abstractions; to philosophise; to reason out conclusions; to care for schemes of thought, are signs in the artistic mind of secondary excellence. A Schiller, an Euripides, a Ben Jonson,

cares for *ideas*—for the parings of the intellect, and the distillation of the mind ; a Shakespeare, a Homer, a Goethe, finds his mental occupation, the true home of his natural thoughts, in the real world—'which is the world of all of us'[1]—where the face of Nature, the moving masses of men and women, are ever changing, ever multiplying, ever mixing one with the other. The reason is plain—the business of the poet, of the artist, is with *types* ; and those types are mirrored in reality. As a painter must not only have a hand to execute, but an eye to distinguish—as he must go here and there through the real world to catch the picturesque man, the picturesque scene, which *is* to live on his canvas—so the poet must find in that reality the *literatesque* man, the *literatesque* scene, which nature intends for him, and which will live in his page. Even in reality he will not find this type complete, or the characteristics perfect ; but there, at least, he will find something, some hint, some intimation, some suggestion ; whereas in the stagnant home of his own thoughts he will find nothing pure, nothing *as it is*, nothing which does not bear his own mark, which is not somehow altered by a mixture with himself.

The first conversation of Goethe and Schiller illustrates this conception of the poet's art. Goethe was at that time prejudiced against Schiller, we must remember, partly from what he considered the *outrages* of the *Robbers*, partly because of the philosophy of Kant. Schiller's essay *On Grace and Dignity*, he tells us—

'was yet less of a kind to reconcile me. The philosophy of Kant, which exalts the dignity of mind so highly, while

[1] Wordsworth : *Prelude*, book xi.

appearing to restrict it, Schiller had joyfully embraced: it unfolded the extraordinary qualities which Nature had implanted in him; and in the lively feeling of freedom and self-direction he showed himself unthankful to the Great Mother, who surely had not acted like a step-dame towards him. Instead of viewing her as self-subsisting, as producing with a living force, and according to appointed laws, alike the highest and the lowest of her works, he took her up under the aspect of some empirical native qualities of the human mind. Certain harsh passages I could even directly apply to myself: they exhibited my confession of faith in a false light; and I felt that if written without particular attention to me, they were still worse; for, in that case, the vast chasm which lay between us gaped but so much the more distinctly.'

After a casual meeting at a Society for Natural History, they walked home, and Goethe proceeds:—

'We reached his house; the talk induced me to go in. I then expounded to him, with as much vivacity as possible, the *Metamorphosis of Plants*,[1] drawing out on paper, with many characteristic strokes, a symbolic plant for him, as I proceeded. He heard and saw all this, with much interest and distinct comprehension; but when I had done, he shook his head and said: "This is no experiment, this is an idea." I stopped with some degree of irritation; for the point which separated us was most luminously marked by this expression. The opinions in *Dignity and Grace* again occurred to me; the old grudge was just awakening; but I smothered it, and merely said: "I was happy to find that I had got ideas without knowing it, nay, that I saw them before my eyes."

'Schiller had much more prudence and dexterity of management than I; he was also thinking of his periodical the *Horen*, about this time, and of course rather wished to attract than repel me. Accordingly, he answered me like an accomplished Kantite; and as my stiff-necked Realism gave occasion to many contradictions, much battling took place between us, and at last a truce, in which neither party

[1] 'A curious physiologico-botanical theory by Goethe, which appears to be entirely unknown in this country: though several eminent continental botanists have noticed it with commendation. It is explained at considerable length in this same *Morphologie*.'—[Note by Carlyle.]

would consent to yield the victory, but each held himself invincible. Positions like the following grieved me to the very soul: *How can there ever be an experiment, that shall correspond with an idea? The specific quality of an idea is, that no experiment can reach it or agree with it.* Yet if he held as an idea, the same thing which I looked upon as an experiment, there must certainly, I thought, be some community between us—some ground whereon both of us might meet!' [1]

With Goethe's natural history, or with Kant's philosophy, we have here no concern; but we can combine the expressions of the two great poets into a nearly complete description of poetry. The 'symbolic plant' is the *type* of which we speak, the ideal at which inferior specimens aim, the class characteristic in which they all share, but which none shows forth fully. Goethe was right in searching for this in reality and nature; Schiller was right in saying that it was an 'idea,' a transcending notion to which approximations could be found in experience, but only approximations—which could not be found there itself. Goethe, as a poet, rightly felt the primary necessity of outward suggestion and experience; Schiller, as a philosopher, rightly felt its imperfection.

But in these delicate matters it is easy to misapprehend. There is, undoubtedly, a sort of poetry which is produced as it were out of the author's mind. The description of the poet's own moods and feelings is a common sort of poetry—perhaps the commonest sort. But the peculiarity of such cases is that the poet does not describe himself *as* himself; autobiography is not his object; he takes himself as a specimen of human nature; he describes, not himself, but a distillation of himself: he takes such of his moods as are most characteristic, as most

[1] Carlyle's *Life of Schiller*: Appendix iii.

typify certain moods of certain men, or certain moods of all men; he chooses preponderant feelings of special sorts of men, or occasional feelings of men of all sorts; but, with whatever other difference and diversity, the essence is that such self-describing poets describe what is *in* them, but not *peculiar* to them,—what is generic, not what is special and individual. Gray's *Elegy* describes a mood which Gray felt more than other men, but which most others, perhaps all others, feel too. It is more popular, perhaps, than any English poem, because that sort of feeling is the most diffused of high feelings, and because Gray added to a singular nicety of fancy an habitual proneness to a *contemplative*—a discerning but unbiassed—meditation on death and on life. Other poets cannot hope for such success: a subject so popular, so grave, so wise, and yet so suitable to the writer's nature, is hardly to be found. But the same ideal, the same unautobiographical character is to be found in the writings of meaner men. Take sonnets of Hartley Coleridge, for example:—

I.

TO A FRIEND.

'When we were idlers with the loitering rills,
The need of human love we little noted:
Our love was nature; and the peace that floated
On the white mist, and dwelt upon the hills,
To sweet accord subdued our wayward wills:
One soul was ours, one mind, one heart devoted,
That, wisely doating, ask'd not why it doated,
And ours the unknown joy, which knowing kills.
But now I find, how dear thou wert to me;
That man is more than half of nature's treasure,
Of that fair Beauty which no eye can see,
Of that sweet music which no ear can measure;
And now the streams may sing for others' pleasure,
The hills sleep on in their eternity.'

II.

TO THE SAME.

'In the great city we are met again,
Where many souls there are, that breathe and die,
Scarce knowing more of nature's potency,
Than what they learn from heat, or cold, or rain,
The sad vicissitude of weary pain ;—
For busy man is lord of ear and eye,
And what hath nature, but the vast void sky,
And the throng'd river toiling to the main ?
Oh ! say not so, for she shall have her part
In every smile, in every tear that falls,
And she shall hide her in the secret heart,
Where love persuades, and sterner duty calls :
But worse it were than death, or sorrow's smart,
To live without a friend within these walls.'

III.

TO THE SAME.

'We parted on the mountains, as two streams
From one clear spring pursue their several ways ;
And thy fleet course hath been through many a maze
In foreign lands, where silvery Padus gleams
To that delicious sky, whose glowing beams
Brighten'd the tresses that old Poets praise ;
Where Petrarch's patient love, and artful lays,
And Ariosto's song of many themes,
Moved the soft air. But I, a lazy brook,
As close pent up within my native dell,
Have crept along from nook to shady nook,
Where flow'rets blow, and whispering Naiads dwell.
Yet now we meet, that parted were so wide,
O'er rough and smooth to travel side by side.'

The contrast of instructive and enviable locomotion with refining but instructive meditation is not special and peculiar to these two, but general and universal. It was set down by Hartley Coleridge because he was the most meditative and refining of men.

What sort of *literatesque* types are fit to be described in the sort of literature called poetry, is a matter on which much might be written. Mr.

Arnold, some years since, put forth a theory that the art of poetry could only delineate *great actions*. But though, rightly interpreted and understood—using the word action so as to include high and sound activity in contemplation—this definition may suit the highest poetry, it certainly cannot be stretched to include many inferior sorts and even many good sorts. Nobody in their senses would describe Gray's *Elegy* as the delineation of a 'great action'; some kinds of mental contemplation may be energetic enough to deserve this name, but Gray would have been frightened at the very word. He loved scholar-like calm and quiet inaction; his very greatness depended on his *not* acting, on his 'wise passiveness,' on his indulging the grave idleness which so well appreciates so much of human life. But the best answer—the *reductio ad absurdum*—of Mr. Arnold's doctrine is the mutilation which it has caused him to make of his own writings. It has forbidden him, he tells us, to reprint *Empedocles*—a poem undoubtedly containing defects and even excesses, but containing also these lines :—

'And yet what days were those, Parmenides!
When we were young, when we could number friends
In all the Italian cities like ourselves,
When with elated hearts we join'd your train,
Ye Sun-born Virgins! on the road of truth.
Then we could still enjoy, then neither thought
Nor outward things were clos'd and dead to us;
But we receiv'd the shock of mighty thoughts
On simple minds with a pure natural joy;
And if the sacred load oppress'd our brain,
We had the power to feel the pressure eas'd,
The brow unbound, the thoughts flow free again,
In the delightful commerce of the world.
We had not lost our balance then, nor grown
Thought's slaves, and dead to every natural joy.
The smallest thing could give us pleasure then—
The sports of the country people,

A flute note from the woods,
Sunset over the sea:
Seed-time and harvest,
The reapers in the corn,
The vinedresser in his vineyard,
The village-girl at her wheel.

'Fulness of life and power of feeling, ye
Are for the happy, for the souls at ease,
Who dwell on a firm basis of content!
But he, who has outliv'd his prosperous days—
But he, whose youth fell on a different world
From that on which his exil'd age is thrown—
Whose mind was fed on other food, was train'd
By other rules that [1] are in vogue to-day—
Whose habit of thought is fix'd, who will not change,
But, in a world he loves not, must subsist
In ceaseless opposition, be the guard
Of his own breast, fetter'd to what he guards,
That the world win no mastery over him—
Who has no friend, no fellow left, not one;
Who has no minute's breathing space allow'd
To nurse his dwindling faculty of joy—
Joy and the outward world must die to him,
As they are dead to me.' [2]

What freak of criticism can induce a man who has written such poetry as this, to discard it, and say it is not poetry? Mr. Arnold is privileged to speak of his own poems, but no other critic could speak so and not be laughed at.

We are disposed to believe that no very sharp definition can be given—at least in the present state of the critical art—of the boundary line between poetry and other sorts of imaginative delineation. Between the undoubted dominions of the two kinds there is a debatable land; everybody is agreed that the *Œdipus at Colonus* is poetry: every one is agreed that the wonderful appearance of Mrs. Veal [3]

[1] 'than.' [2] *Empedocles on Etna*: Act ii.

[3] An imaginary woman, of whose appearance after death to a Mrs. Hargrave, at Canterbury, De Foe has given a most circumstantial account.

is *not* poetry. But the exact line which separates grave novels in verse, like *Aylmer's Field* or *Enoch Arden*, from grave novels not in verse, like *Silas Marner* or *Adam Bede*, we own we cannot draw with any confidence. Nor, perhaps, is it very important; whether a narrative is thrown into verse or not certainly depends in part on the taste of the age, and in part on its mechanical helps. Verse is the only mechanical help to the memory in rude times, and there is little writing till a cheap something is found to write upon, and a cheap something to write with. Poetry—verse, at least—is the literature of *all work* in early ages; it is only later ages which write in what *they* think a natural and simple prose.

There are other casual influences in the matter too; but they are not material now. We need only say here that poetry, because it has a more marked rhythm than prose, must be more intense in meaning and more concise in style than prose. People expect a 'marked rhythm' to imply something worth marking; if it fails to do so they are disappointed. They are displeased at the visible waste of a powerful instrument; they call it 'doggerel,' and rightly call it, for the metrical expression of full thought and eager feeling—the burst of metre—incident to high imagination, should not be wasted on petty matters which prose does as well—which it does better—which it suits by its very limpness and weakness, whose small changes it follows more easily, and to whose lowest details it can fully and without effort degrade itself. Verse, too, should be *more concise*, for long continued rhythm tends to jade the mind, just as brief rhythm tends to attract the attention. Poetry should be memorable and emphatic, intense, and *soon over*.

The great divisions of poetry, and of all other literary art, arise from the different modes in which these *types*—these characteristic men, these characteristic feelings—may be variously described. There are three principal modes which we shall attempt to describe—the *pure*, which is sometimes, but not very wisely, called the classical; the *ornate*, which is also unwisely called romantic; and the *grotesque*, which might be called the mediæval. We will describe the nature of these a little. Criticism, we know, must be brief—not, like poetry, because its charm is too intense to be sustained—but, on the contrary, because its interest is too weak to be prolonged; but elementary criticism, if an evil, is a necessary evil; a little while spent among the simple principles of art is the first condition, the absolute pre-requisite, for surely apprehending and wisely judging the complete embodiments and miscellaneous forms of actual literature.

The definition of *pure* literature is that it describes the type in its simplicity, we mean, with the exact amount of accessory circumstance which is necessary to bring it before the mind in finished perfection, and *no more* than that amount. The *type* needs some accessories from its nature—a picturesque landscape does not consist wholly of picturesque features. There is a setting of surroundings—as the Americans would say, of *fixings*—without which the reality is not itself. By a traditional mode of speech, as soon as we see a picture in which a complete effect is produced by detail so rare and so harmonised as to escape us, we say, How 'classical'! The whole which is to be seen appears at once and through the detail, but the detail itself is not seen: we do not think of that which gives us the idea; we are absorbed in

the idea itself. Just so in literature, the pure art is that which works with the fewest strokes; the fewest, that is, for its purpose, for its aim is to call up and bring home to men an idea, a form, a character, and if that idea be twisted, that form be involved, that character perplexed, many strokes of literary art will be needful. Pure art does not mutilate its object; it represents it as fully as is possible with the slightest effort which is possible: it shrinks from no needful circumstances, as little as it inserts any which are needless. The precise peculiarity is not merely that no incidental circumstance is inserted which does not tell on the main design: no art is fit to be called *art* which permits a stroke to be put in without an object; but that only the minimum of such circumstance is inserted at all. The form is sometimes said to be bare, the accessories are sometimes said to be invisible, because the appendages are so choice that the shape only is perceived.

The English literature undoubtedly contains much impure literature: impure in its style, if not in its meaning; but it also contains one great, one nearly perfect, model of the pure style in the literary expression of typical *sentiment*; and one not perfect, but gigantic and close approximation to perfection in the pure delineation of objective character. Wordsworth, perhaps, comes as near to choice purity of style in sentiment as is possible; Milton, with exceptions and conditions to be explained, approaches perfection by the strenuous purity with which he depicts character.

A wit once said, that '*pretty* women had more features than *beautiful* women,' and though the expression may be criticised, the meaning is correct. Pretty women seem to have a great number of attractive points, each of which attracts your atten-

tion, and each one of which you remember afterwards; yet these points have not *grown together*, their features have not linked themselves into a single inseparable whole. But a beautiful woman is a whole as she is; you no more take her to pieces than a Greek statue; she is not an aggregate of divisible charms, she is a charm in herself. Such ever is the dividing test of pure art; if you catch yourself admiring its details, it is defective; you ought to think of it as a single whole which you must remember, which you must admire, which somehow subdues you while you admire it, which is a ' possession ' to you ' for ever.'

Of course no individual poem embodies this ideal perfectly; of course every human word and phrase has its imperfections, and if we choose an instance to illustrate that ideal, the instance has scarcely a fair chance. By contrasting it with the ideal, we suggest its imperfections; by protruding it as an example, we turn on its defectiveness the miscroscope of criticism. Yet these two sonnets of Wordsworth may be fitly read in this place, not because they are quite without faults, or because they are the very best examples of their kind of style, but because they are *luminous* examples; the compactness of the sonnet and the gravity of the sentiment, hedging in the thoughts, restraining the fancy, and helping to maintain a singleness of expression.

THE TROSSACHS.

' There's not a nook within this solemn Pass,
But were an apt confessional for One
Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone,
That Life is but a tale of morning grass
Withered at eve. From scenes of art which chase
That thought away, turn, and with watchful eyes
Feed it 'mid Nature's old felicities,
Rocks, rivers, and smooth lakes more clear than glass

Untouched, unbreathed upon. Thrice happy quest,
If from a golden perch of aspen spray
(October's workmanship to rival May)
The pensive warbler of the ruddy breast
That moral sweeten by a heaven-taught lay
Lulling the year, with all its cares, to rest!'

COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE, SEPT. 3, 1802.

'Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This city now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!'

Instances of barer style than this may easily be found, instances of colder style—few better instances of purer style. Not a single expression (the invocation in the concluding couplet of the second sonnet perhaps excepted) can be spared, yet not a single expression rivets the attention. If, indeed, we take out the phrase—

> 'The city [now] doth, like a garment, wear
> The beauty of the morning,'

and the description of the brilliant yellow of autumn—

> 'October's workmanship to rival May,'

they have independent value, but they are not noticed in the sonnet when we read it through; they fall into place there, and, being in their place, are not seen. The great subjects of the two sonnets, the religious aspect of beautiful but grave Nature—the

religious aspect of a city about to awaken and be alive, are the only ideas left in our mind. To Wordsworth has been vouchsafed the last grace of the self-denying artist; you think neither of him nor his style, but you cannot help thinking of—you *must* recall—the exact phrase, the *very* sentiment he wished.

Milton's purity is more eager. In the most exciting parts of Wordsworth—and these sonnets are not very exciting—you always feel, you never forget, that what you have before you is the excitement of a recluse. There is nothing of the stir of life; nothing of the *brawl* of the world. But Milton, though always a scholar by trade, though solitary in old age, was through life intent on great affairs, lived close to great scenes, watched a revolution, and if not an actor in it, was at least secretary to the actors. He was familiar—by daily experience and habitual sympathy—with the earnest debate of arduous questions, on which the life and death of the speakers certainly depended, on which the weal or woe of the country perhaps depended. He knew how profoundly the individual character of the speakers—their inner and real nature—modifies their opinion on such questions; he knew how surely that nature will appear in the expression of them. This great experience, fashioned by a fine imagination, gives to the debate of Satanic Council in Pandæmonium its reality and its life. It is a debate in the Long Parliament, and though the *theme* of *Paradise Lost* obliged Milton to side with the monarchical element in the universe, his old habits are often too much for him; and his real sympathy—the impetus and energy of his nature—side with the rebellious element. For the purposes of art this is much better.

Of a court, a poet can make but little ; of a heaven, he can make very little ; but of a courtly heaven, such as Milton conceived, he can make nothing at all. The idea of a court and the idea of a heaven are so radically different, that a distinct combination of them is always grotesque and often ludicrous. *Paradise Lost*, as a whole, is radically tainted by a vicious principle. It professes to justify the ways of God to man, to account for sin and death, and it tells you that the whole originated in a *political event* ; in a court squabble as to a particular act of patronage and the due or undue promotion of an eldest son. Satan may have been wrong, but on Milton's theory he had an *arguable* case at least. There was something arbitrary in the promotion ; there were little symptoms of a job ; in *Paradise Lost* it is always clear that the devils are the weaker, but it is never clear that the angels are the better. Milton's sympathy and his imagination slip back to the Puritan rebels whom he loved, and desert the courtly angels whom he could not love, although he praised [them]. There is no wonder that Milton's hell is better than his heaven, for he hated officials and he loved rebels, for he employs his genius below, and accumulates his pedantry above. On the great debate in Pandæmonium all his genius is concentrated. The question is very practical ; it is, 'What are we devils to do, now we have lost heaven ?' Satan, who presides over and manipulates the assembly—Moloch,

> 'the fiercest spirit
> That fought in Heaven, now fiercer by despair,'

who wants to fight again ; Belial, 'the man of the world,' who does not want to fight any more ;

Mammon, who is for commencing an industrial career; Beelzebub, the official statesman,

> 'deep on his front engraven,
> Deliberation sat and Public care,'

who, at Satan's instance, proposes the invasion of earth,—are as distinct as so many statues. Even Belial, 'the man of the world,' the sort of man with whom Milton had least sympathy, is perfectly painted. An inferior artist would have made the actor who 'counselled ignoble ease and peaceful sloth,' a degraded and ugly creature; but Milton knew better. He knew that low notions require a better garb than high notions. Human nature is not a high thing, but at least it has a high idea of itself; it will not accept mean maxims, unless they are gilded and made beautiful. A prophet in goat-skin may cry, 'Repent, repent,' but it takes 'purple and fine linen' to be able to say, 'Continue in your sins.' The world vanquishes with its speciousness and its show, and the orator who is to persuade men to worldliness must have a share in them. Milton well knew this; after the warlike speech of the fierce Moloch, he introduces a brighter and a more graceful spirit.

> 'He ended frowning, and his look denounced
> Desp'rate revenge, and battle dangerous
> To less than gods. On th' other side up rose
> Belial, in act more graceful and humane.
> A fairer person lost not Heaven; he seem'd
> For dignity composed, and high exploit:
> But all was false and hollow; though his tongue
> Dropt manna, and could make the worse appear
> The better reason, to perplex and dash
> Maturest counsels; for his thoughts were low—
> To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds
> Tim'rous and slothful. Yet he pleased the ear,
> And with persuasive accent thus began:'[1]

[1] Book ii. l. 106.

He does not begin like a man with a strong case, but like a man with a weak case; he knows that the pride of human nature is irritated by mean advice, and though he may probably persuade men to *take* it, he must carefully apologise for *giving* it. Here, as elsewhere, though the formal address is to devils, the real address is to men; to the human nature which we know, not to the fictitious demonic nature we do not know.

'I should be much for open war, O Peers,
As not behind in hate, if what was urged
Main reason to persuade immediate war
Did not dissuade me most, and seem to cast
Ominous conjecture on the whole success;
When he who most excels in fact of arms,
In what he counsels and in what excels
Mistrustful, grounds his courage on despair
And utter dissolution, as the scope
Of all his aim, after some dire revenge.
First, what revenge? The tow'rs of Heav'n are fill'd
With armèd watch, that render all access
Impregnable: oft on the bord'ring Deep
Encamp their legions, or with obscure wing
Scout far and wide into the realm of Night,
Scorning surprise. Or, could we break our way
By force, and at our heels all Hell should rise
With blackest insurrection, to confound
Heav'n's purest light, yet our great Enemy,
All incorruptible, would on His throne
Sit unpolluted, and th' ethereal mould,
Incapable of stain, would soon expel
Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire,
Victorious. Thus repulsed, our final hope
Is flat despair: we must exasperate
Th' Almighty Victor to spend all His rage;
And that must end us; that must be our cure—
To be no more. Sad cure! for who would lose,
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
To perish rather, swallow'd up and lost
In the wide womb of uncreated Night,
Devoid of sense and motion? And who knows,
Let this be good, whether our angry Foe
Can give it, or will ever? How He can

Is doubtful; that He never will is sure.
Will He, so wise, let loose at once His ire,
Belike through impotence or unaware,
To give His enemies their wish, and end
Them in His anger whom His anger saves
To punish endless? "Wherefore cease we, then?"
Say they who counsel war; "we are decreed,
Reserved, and destined to eternal woe;
Whatever doing, what can we suffer more,
What can we suffer worse?" Is this, then, worst—
Thus sitting, thus consulting, thus in arms?'

. . . . . .

And so on.

Mr. Pitt knew this speech by heart, and Lord Macaulay has called it incomparable; and these judges of the oratorical art have well decided. A mean foreign policy cannot be better defended. Its sensibleness is effectually explained, and its tameness as much as possible disguised.

But we have not here to do with the excellence of Belial's policy, but with the excellence of his speech; and with that speech in a peculiar manner. This speech, taken with the few lines of description with which Milton introduces them, embodies, in as short a space as possible, with as much perfection as possible, the delineation of the type of character common at all times, dangerous in many times; sure to come to the surface in moments of difficulty, and never more dangerous than then. As Milton describes it, it is one among several *typical* characters which will ever have their place in great councils, which will ever be heard at important decisions, which are part of the characteristic and inalienable whole of this statesmanlike world. The debate in Pandæmonium is a debate among these typical characters at the greatest conceivable crisis, and with adjuncts of solemnity which no other situation

could rival. It is the greatest *classical* triumph, the highest achievement of the *pure* style in English literature; it is the greatest description of the highest and most typical characters with the most choice circumstances and in the fewest words.

It is not unremarkable that we should find in Milton and in *Paradise Lost* the best specimen of pure style. Milton was a schoolmaster in a pedantic age, and there is nothing so unclassical—nothing so impure in style—as pedantry. The out-of-door conversational life of Athens was as opposed to bookish scholasticism as a life can be. The most perfect books have been written not by those who thought much of books, but by those who thought little, by those who were under the restraint of a sensitive talking world, to which books had contributed something, and a various, eager life the rest. Milton is generally unclassical in spirit where he is learned, and naturally, because the purest poets do not overlay their conceptions with book-knowledge, and the classical poets, having in comparison no books, were under little temptation to impair the purity of their style by the accumulation of their research.

Over and above this, there is in Milton, and a little in Wordsworth also, one defect which is in the highest degree faulty and unclassical, which mars the effect and impairs the perfection of the pure style. There is a want of *spontaneity*, and a sense of effort. It has been happily said that Plato's words must have *grown* into their places. No one would say so of Milton or even of Wordsworth. About both of them there is a taint of duty; a vicious sense of the good man's task. Things seem right where they are, but they seem to be put where they are. *Flexibility* is essential to the consummate perfection of the pure style, because the sensation

of the poet's efforts carries away our thoughts from his achievements. We are admiring his labours when we should be enjoying his words. But this is a defect in those two writers, not a defect in pure art. Of course it *is* more difficult to write in few words than to write in many; to take the best adjuncts, and those only, for what you have to say, instead of using all which come to hand: it *is* an additional labour if you write verses in a morning, to spend the rest of the day in *choosing*, making those verses fewer. But a perfect artist in the pure style is as effortless and as natural as in any style, perhaps is more so. Take the well-known lines:—

> 'There was a little lawny islet,
> By anemone and violet,
> Like mosaic, paven:
> And its roof was flowers and leaves
> Which the summer's breath enweaves,
> Where nor sun nor showers nor breeze
> Pierce the pines and tallest trees,
> Each a gem engraven:
> Girt by many an azure wave
> With which the clouds and mountains pave
> A lake's blue chasm.'[1]

Shelley had many merits and many defects. This is not the place for a complete, or indeed for *any* estimate of him. But one excellence is most evident. His words are as flexible as any words; the rhythm of some modulating air seems to move them into their place without a struggle by the poet, and almost without his knowledge. This is the perfection of pure art, to embody typical conceptions in the choicest, the fewest accidents, to embody them so that each of these accidents may produce its full effect, and so to embody them without effort.

The extreme opposite to this pure art is what may

[1] 'The Isle.'

be called ornate art. This species of art aims also at giving a delineation of the typical idea in its perfection and its fulness, but it aims at so doing in a manner most different. It wishes to surround the type with the greatest number of circumstances which it will *bear*. It works not by choice and selection, but by accumulation and aggregation. The idea is not, as in the pure style, presented with the least clothing which it will endure, but with the richest and most involved clothing that it will admit.

We are fortunate in not having to hunt out of past literature an illustrative specimen of the ornate style. Mr. Tennyson has just given one admirable in itself, and most characteristic of the defects and the merits of this style. The story of Enoch Arden, as he has enhanced and presented it, is a rich and splendid composite of imagery and illustration. Yet how simple that story is in itself! A sailor who sells fish, breaks his leg, gets dismal, gives up selling fish, goes to sea, is wrecked on a desert island, stays there some years, on his return finds his wife married to a miller, speaks to a landlady on the subject, and dies. Told in the pure and simple, the unadorned and classical style, this story would not have taken three pages, but Mr. Tennyson has been able to make it the principal—the largest tale in his new volume. He has done so only by giving to every event and incident in the volume an accompanying commentary. He tells a great deal about the torrid zone, which a rough sailor like Enoch Arden certainly would not have perceived; and he gives to the fishing village, to which all the characters belong, a softness and a fascination which such villages scarcely possess in reality.

The description of the tropical island on which the sailor is thrown, is an absolute model of adorned art:—

'The mountain wooded to the peak, the lawns
And winding glades high up like ways to Heaven,
The slender coco's drooping crown of plumes,
The lightning flash of insect and of bird,
The lustre of the long convolvuluses
That coil'd around the stately stems, and ran
Ev'n to the limit of the land, the glows
And glories of the broad belt of the world,
All these he saw; but what he fain had seen
He could not see, the kindly human face,
Nor ever hear a kindly voice, but heard
The myriad shriek of wheeling ocean-fowl,
The league-long roller thundering on the reef,
The moving whisper of huge trees that branch'd
And blossom'd in the zenith, or the sweep
Of some precipitous rivulet to the wave,
As down the shore he ranged, or all day long
Sat often in the seaward-gazing gorge,
A shipwreck'd sailor, waiting for a sail:
No sail from day to day, but every day
The sunrise broken into scarlet shafts
Among the palms and ferns and precipices;
The blaze upon the waters to the east;
The blaze upon his island overhead;
The blaze upon the waters to the west;
Then the great stars that globed themselves in Heaven,
The hollower-bellowing ocean, and again
The scarlet shafts of sunrise—but no sail.'

No expressive circumstances can be added to this description, no enhancing detail suggested. A much less happy instance is the description of Enoch's life before he sailed :—

'While Enoch was abroad on wrathful seas,
Or often journeying landward; for in truth
Enoch's white horse, and Enoch's ocean spoil
In ocean-smelling osier, and his face,
Rough-redden'd with a thousand winter gales,
Not only to the market-cross were known,
But in the leafy lanes behind the down,
Far as the portal-warding lion-whelp,
And peacock yew-tree of the lonely Hall,
Whose Friday fare was Enoch's ministering.'

So much has not often been made of selling fish.

The essence of ornate art is in this manner to accumulate round the typical object, everything which can be said about it, every associated thought that can be connected with it, without impairing the essence of the delineation.

The first defect which strikes a student of ornate art—the first which arrests the mere reader of it—is what is called a want of simplicity. Nothing is described as it is; everything has about it an atmosphere of *something else*. The combined and associated thoughts, though they set off and heighten particular ideas and aspects of the central and typical conception, yet complicate it: a simple thing—'a daisy by the river's brim'—is never left by itself, something else is put with it; something not more connected with it than 'lion-whelp' and the 'peacock yew-tree' are with the 'fresh fish for sale' that Enoch carries past them. Even in the highest cases, ornate art leaves upon a cultured and delicate taste the conviction that it is not the highest art, that it is somehow excessive and over-rich, that it is not chaste in itself or chastening to the mind that sees it—that it is in an unexplained manner unsatisfactory, 'a thing in which we feel there is some hidden want!'

That want is a want of 'definition.' We must all know landscapes, river landscapes especially, which are in the highest sense beautiful, which when we first see them give us a delicate pleasure; which in some—and these the best cases—give even a gentle sense of surprise that such things should be so beautiful, and yet when we come to live in them, to spend even a few hours in them, we seem stifled and oppressed. On the other hand, there are people to whom the seashore is a companion, an exhilaration; and not so much for the brawl of the shore

as for the *limited* vastness, the finite infinite of the ocean as they see it. Such people often come home braced and nerved, and if they spoke out the truth, would have only to say, 'We have seen the horizon line;' if they were let alone, indeed, they would gaze on it hour after hour, so great to them is the fascination, so full the sustaining calm, which they gain from that union of form and greatness. To a very inferior extent, but still, perhaps, to an extent which most people understand better, a common arch will have the same effect. A bridge completes a river landscape; if of the old and many-arched sort, it regulates by a long series of defined forms the vague outline of wood and river, which before had nothing to measure it; if of the new scientific sort, it introduces still more strictly a geometrical element; it stiffens the scenery which was before too soft, too delicate, too vegetable.

Just such is the effect of pure style in literary art. It calms by conciseness; while the ornate style leaves on the mind a mist of beauty, an excess of fascination, a complication of charm, the pure style leaves behind it the simple, defined, measured idea, as it is, and by itself. That which is chaste chastens; there is a poised energy—a state half thrill, half tranquillity—which pure art gives, which no other can give; a pleasure justified as well as felt; an ennobled satisfaction at what ought to satisfy us, and must ennoble us.

Ornate art is to pure art what a painted statue is to an unpainted. It is impossible to deny that a touch of colour *does* bring out certain parts; does convey certain expressions; does heighten certain features, but it leaves on the work as a whole, a want, as we say, 'of something;' a want of that inseparable chasteness which clings to simple sculp-

ture, an impairing predominance of alluring details which impairs our satisfaction with our own satisfaction; which makes us doubt whether a higher being than ourselves will be satisfied even though we are so. In the very same manner, though the *rouge* of ornate literature excites our eye, it also impairs our confidence.

Mr. Arnold has justly observed [1] that this self-justifiying, *self-proving* purity of style is commoner in ancient literature than in modern literature, and also that Shakespeare is not a great or an unmixed example of it. No one can say that he is. His works are full of undergrowth, are full of complexity, are not models of style; except by a miracle, nothing in the Elizabethan age could be a model of style; the restraining taste of that age was feebler and more mistaken than that of any other equally great age. Shakespeare's mind so teemed with creation that he required the most just, most forcible, most constant restraint from without. He most needed to be guided among poets, and he was the least and worst guided. As a whole, no one can call his works finished models of the pure style, or of any style. But he has many passages of the most pure style, passages which could be easily cited if space served. And we must remember that the task which Shakespeare undertook was the most difficult which any poet has ever attempted, and that it is a task in which after a million efforts every other poet has failed.

The Elizabethan drama—as Shakespeare has immortalised it—undertakes to delineate in five acts, under stage restrictions, and in mere dialogue, a whole list of *dramatis personæ*, a set of characters enough for a modern novel, and with the distinct-

[1] Preface to *Poems*. (1853.) See *infra*, ii. 163 n.

ness of a modern novel. Shakespeare is not content to give two or three great characters in solitude and in dignity, like the classical dramatists; he wishes to give a whole *party* of characters in the play of life, and according to the nature of each. He would 'hold the mirror up to nature,' not to catch a monarch in a tragic posture, but a whole group of characters engaged in many actions, intent on many purposes, thinking many thoughts. There is life enough, there is action enough, in single plays of Shakespeare to set up an ancient dramatist for a long career. And Shakespeare succeeded. His characters, taken *en masse*, and as a whole, are as well known as any novelist's characters; cultivated men know all about them, as young ladies know all about Mr. Trollope's novels. But no other dramatist has succeeded in such an aim. No one else's characters are staple people in English literature, hereditary people whom every one knows all about in every generation.

The contemporary dramatists, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, etc., had many merits, some of them were great men. But a critic must say of them the worst thing he has to say: 'They were men who failed in their characteristic aim;' they attempted to describe numerous sets of complicated characters, and they failed. No one of such characters, or hardly one, lives in common memory; the *Faustus* of Marlowe, a really great idea, is not remembered. They undertook to write what they could not write—five acts full of real characters, and, in consequence, the fine individual things they conceived are forgotten by the mixed multitude, and known only to a few of the few. Of the Spanish theatre we cannot speak; but there are no such characters in any French tragedy:

the whole aim of that tragedy forbade it. Goethe has added to literature a few great characters; he may be said almost to have added to literature the idea of 'intellectual creation,'—the idea of describing the great characters through the intellect; but he has not added to the common stock what Shakespeare added, a new *multitude* of men and women; and these not in simple attitudes, but amid the most complex parts of life, with all their various natures roused, mixed, and strained.

The severest art must have allowed many details, much overflowing circumstance, to a poet who undertook to describe what almost defies description. Pure art would have *commanded* him to use details lavishly, for only by a multiplicity of such could the required effect have been at all produced. Shakespeare could accomplish it, for his mind was a *spring*, an inexhaustible fountain of human nature, and it is no wonder that, being compelled by the task of his time to let the fullness of his nature overflow, he sometimes let it overflow too much, and covered with erroneous conceits and superfluous images characters and conceptions which would have been far more justly, far more effectually, delineated with conciseness and simplicity. But there is an infinity of pure art *in* Shakespeare, although there is a great deal else also.

It will be said, if ornate art be, as you say, an inferior species of art, why should it ever be used? If pure art be the best sort of art, why should it not always be used?

The reason is this: literary art, as we just now explained, is concerned with literatesque characters in literatesque situations; and the *best* art is concerned with the *most* literatesque characters in the *most* literatesque situations. Such are the subjects

of pure art; it embodies with the fewest touches, and under the most select and choice circumstances, the highest conceptions; but it does not follow that only the best subjects are to be treated by art, and then only in the very best way. Human nature could not endure such a critical commandment as that, and it would be an erroneous criticism which gave it. *Any* literatesque character may be described in literature under *any* circumstances which exhibit its literatesqueness.

The essence of pure art consists in its describing what is as it is, and this is very well for what can bear it, but there are many inferior things which will not bear it, and which nevertheless ought to be described in books. A certain kind of literature deals with illusions, and this kind of literature has given a colouring to the name romantic. A man of rare genius, and even of poetical genius, has gone so far as to make these illusions the true subject of poetry—almost the sole subject.

'Without,' says Father Newman, of one of his characters,[1] 'being himself a poet, he was in the season of poetry, in the sweet spring-time, when the year is most beautiful, because it is new. Novelty was beauty to a heart so open and cheerful as his; not only because it was novelty, and had its proper charm as such, but because when we first see things, we see them in a gay confusion, which is a principal element of the poetical. As time goes on, and we number and sort and measure things,—as we gain views,—we advance towards philosophy and truth, but we recede from poetry.

'When we ourselves were young, we once on a time walked on a hot summer day from Oxford to Newington—a dull road, as any one who has gone it knows; yet it was new to us; and we protest to you, reader, believe it or not, laugh or not, as you will, to us it seemed on that occasion quite touchingly beautiful; and a soft melancholy came over us, of which the shadows fall even now, when we look back on that dusty, weary journey. And why? because every

[1] In *Loss and Gain*, Part I. chap. iii.

object which met us was unknown and full of mystery. A tree or two in the distance seemed the beginning of a great wood, or park, stretching endlessly; a hill implied a vale beyond, with that vale's history; the bye-lanes, with their green hedges, wound on and vanished, yet were not lost to the imagination. Such was our first journey; but when we had gone it several times, the mind refused to act, the scene ceased to enchant, stern reality alone remained; and we thought it one of the most tiresome, odious roads we ever had occasion to traverse.'

That is to say that the function of the poet is to introduce a 'gay confusion,' a rich medley which does not exist in the actual world—which perhaps could not exist in any world—but which would seem pretty if it did exist. Every one who reads *Enoch Arden* will perceive that this notion of all poetry is exactly applicable to this one poem. Whatever be made of Enoch's 'Ocean spoil in ocean-smelling osier,' of the 'portal-warding lion-whelp, and the peacock yew-tree,' every one knows that in himself Enoch could not have been charming. People who sell fish about the country (and that is what he did, though Mr. Tennyson won't speak out, and wraps it up) never are beautiful. As Enoch was and must be coarse, in itself the poem must depend for a charm on a 'gay confusion'—on a splendid accumulation of impossible accessories.

Mr. Tennyson knows this better than many of us—he knows the country world; he has proved it that no one living knows it better; he has painted with pure art—with art which describes what is a race perhaps more refined, more delicate, more conscientious, than the sailor — the 'Northern Farmer,' and we all know what a splendid, what a living thing, he has made of it. He could, if he only would, have given us the ideal sailor in like manner—the ideal of the natural sailor we mean—the characteristic present man as he lives and is.

But this he has not chosen. He has endeavoured to describe an exceptional sailor, at an exceptionally refined port, performing a graceful act, an act of relinquishment. And with this task before him, his profound taste taught him that ornate art was a necessary medium—was the sole effectual instrument—for his purpose.

It was necessary for him if possible to abstract the mind from reality, to induce us *not* to conceive or think of sailors as they are while we are reading of his sailors, but to think of what a person who did not know, might fancy sailors to be. A casual traveller on the seashore, with the sensitive mood and the romantic imagination Mr. Newman has described, might fancy, would fancy, a seafaring village to be like that. Accordingly, Mr. Tennyson has made it his aim to call off the stress of fancy from real life, to occupy it otherwise, to bury it with pretty accessories; to engage it on the 'peacock yew-tree,' and the 'portal-warding lion-whelp.' Nothing, too, can be more splendid than the description of the tropics as Mr. Tennyson delineates them, but a sailor would not have felt the tropics in that manner. The beauties of Nature would not have so much occupied him. He would have known little of the scarlet shafts of sunrise and nothing of the long convolvuluses. As in Robinson Crusoe, his own petty contrivances and his small ailments would have been the principal subject to him. 'For three years,' he might have said, 'my back was bad; and then I put two pegs into a piece of driftwood and so made a chair; and after that it pleased God to send me a chill.' In real life his piety would scarcely have gone beyond that.

It will indeed be said that, though the sailor had no words for, and even no explicit consciousness of,

the splendid details of the torrid zone, yet that he had, notwithstanding, a dim latent inexpressible conception of them: though he could not speak of them or describe them, yet they were much to him. And doubtless such is the case. Rude people are impressed by what is beautiful—deeply impressed—though they could not describe what they see, or what they feel. But what is absurd in Mr. Tennyson's description—absurd when we abstract it from the gorgeous additions and ornaments with which Mr. Tennyson distracts us—is, that his hero feels nothing else but these great splendours. We hear nothing of the physical ailments, the rough devices, the low superstitions, which really would have been the *first* things, the favourite and principal occupations of his mind. Just so when he gets home he *may* have had such fine sentiments, though it is odd, and he *may* have spoken of them to his landlady, though that is odder still,—but it is incredible that his whole mind should be made up of fine sentiment. Besides those sweet feelings, if he had them, there must have been many more obvious, more prosaic, and some perhaps more healthy. Mr. Tennyson has shown a profound judgment in distracting us as he does. He has given us a classic delineation of the 'Northern Farmer' with no ornament at all—as bare a thing as can be—because he then wanted to describe a true type of real men: he has given us a sailor crowded all over with ornament and illustration, because he then wanted to describe an unreal type of fancied men,—not sailors as they are, but sailors as they might be wished.

Another prominent element in *Enoch Arden* is yet more suitable to, yet more requires the aid of, ornate art. Mr. Tennyson undertook to deal with *half*

belief. The presentiments which Annie feels are exactly of that sort which everybody has felt, and which every one has half believed—which hardly any one has more than half believed. Almost every one, it has been said, would be angry if any one else reported that he believed in ghosts; yet hardly any one, when thinking by himself, wholly disbelieves them. Just so such presentiments as Mr. Tennyson depicts, impress the inner mind so much that the outer mind—the rational understanding—hardly likes to consider them nicely or to discuss them sceptically. For these dubious themes an ornate or complex style is needful. Classical art speaks out what it has to say plainly and simply. Pure style cannot hesitate; it describes in concisest outline what is, as it is. If a poet really believes in presentiments, he can speak out in pure style. One who could have been a poet—one of the few in any age of whom one can say certainly that they could have been and have not been—has spoken thus:—

'When Heaven sends sorrow,
Warnings go first,
Lest it should burst
With stunning might
On souls too bright
To fear the morrow.

'Can science bear us
To the hid springs
Of human things?
Why may not dream,
Or thought's day-gleam,
Startle, yet cheer us?

'Are such thoughts fetters,
While Faith disowns
Dread of earth's tones,
Recks but Heaven's call,
And on the wall
Reads but Heaven's letters?'[1]

[1] Newman's *Verses on Various Occasions*: 'Warnings.'

But if a poet is not sure whether presentiments are true or not true ; if he wishes to leave his readers in doubt ; if he wishes an atmosphere of indistinct illusion and of moving shadow, he must use the romantic style, the style of miscellaneous adjunct, the style ' which shirks, not meets ' your intellect, the style which, as you are scrutinising, disappears.

Nor is this all, or even the principal lesson, which *Enoch Arden* may suggest to us, of the use of ornate art. That art is the appropriate art for an *unpleasing type*. Many of the characters of real life, if brought distinctly, prominently, and plainly before the mind, as they really are, if shown in their inner nature, their actual essence, are doubtless very unpleasant. They would be horrid to meet and horrid to think of. We fear it must be owned that ' Enoch Arden ' is this kind of person. A dirty sailor who did *not* go home to his wife is not an agreeable being : a varnish must be put on him to make him shine. It is true that he acts rightly ; that he is very good. But such is human nature that it finds a little tameness in mere morality. Mere virtue belongs to a charity-school girl, and has a taint of the catechism. All of us feel this, though most of us are too timid, too scrupulous, too anxious about the virtue of others to speak out. We are ashamed of our nature in this respect, but it is not the less our nature. And if we look deeper into the matter there are many reasons why we should not be ashamed of it.

The soul of man, and, as we necessarily believe, of beings greater than man, has many parts besides its moral part. It has an intellectual part, an artistic part, even a religious part, in which mere morals have no share. In Shakespeare or Goethe, even in Newton or Archimedes, there is much which

will not be cut down to the shape of the commandments. They have thoughts, feelings, hopes—immortal thoughts and hopes—which have influenced the life of men, and the souls of men, ever since their age, but which 'the whole duty of man,' the ethical compendium, does not recognise. Nothing is more unpleasant than a virtuous person with a mean mind. A highly developed moral nature joined to an undeveloped intellectual nature, an undeveloped artistic nature, and a very limited religious nature, is of necessity repulsive. It represents a bit of human nature—a good bit, of course—but a bit only, in disproportionate, unnatural, and revolting prominence; and therefore, unless an artist use delicate care, we are offended. The dismal act of a squalid man needed many condiments to make it pleasant, and therefore Mr. Tennyson was right to mix them subtly and to use them freely.

A mere act of self-denial can indeed scarcely be pleasant upon paper. A heroic struggle with an external adversary, even though it end in a defeat, may easily be made attractive. Human nature likes to see itself look grand, and it looks grand when it is making a brave struggle with foreign foes. But it does not look grand when it is divided against itself. An excellent person striving with temptation is a very admirable being in reality, but he is not a pleasant being in description. We hope he will win and overcome his temptation; but we feel that he would be a more interesting being, a higher being, if he had not felt that temptation so much. The poet must make the struggle great in order to make the self-denial virtuous, and if the struggle be too great, we are apt to feel some mixture of contempt.

The internal metaphysics of a divided nature

are but an inferior subject for art, and if they are to be made attractive, much else must be combined with them. If he excellence of *Hamlet* had depended on the ethical qualities of Hamlet, it would not have been the masterpiece of our literature. He acts virtuously of course, and kills the people he ought to kill, but Shakespeare knew that such goodness would not much interest the pit. He made him a handsome prince, and a puzzling meditative character; these secular qualities relieve his moral excellence, and so he becomes 'nice.' In proportion as an artist has to deal with types essentially imperfect, he must disguise their imperfections; he must accumulate around them as many first-rate accessories as may make his readers forget that they are themselves second-rate. The sudden *millionaires* of the present day hope to disguise their social defects by buying old places, and hiding among aristocratic furniture; just so a great artist who has to deal with characters artistically imperfect, will use an ornate style, will fit them into a scene where there is much else to look at.

For these reasons, ornate art is, within the limits, as legitimate as pure art. It does what pure art could not do. The very excellence of pure art confines its employment. Precisely because it gives the best things by themselves and exactly as they are, it fails when it is necessary to describe inferior things among other things, with a list of enhancements and a crowd of accompaniments that in reality do not belong to it. Illusion, half belief, unpleasant types, imperfect types, are as much the proper sphere of ornate art, as an inferior landscape is the proper sphere for the true efficacy of moonlight. A really great landscape needs sunlight and bears sunlight; but moonlight is an equaliser of

beauties; it gives a romantic unreality to what will not stand the bare truth. And just so does romantic art.

There is, however, a third kind of art which differs from these on the point in which they most resemble one another. Ornate art and pure art have this in common, that they paint the types of literature in as good perfection as they can. Ornate art, indeed, uses undue disguises and unreal enhancements; it does not confine itself to the best types; on the contrary, it is its office to make the best of imperfect types and lame approximations; but ornate art, as much as pure art, catches its subject in the best light it can, takes the most developed aspect of it which it can find, and throws upon it the most congruous colours it can use. But grotesque art does just the contrary. It takes the type, so to say, *in difficulties*. It gives a representation of it in its minimum development, amid the circumstances least favourable to it, just while it is struggling with obstacles, just where it is encumbered with incongruities. It deals, to use the language of science, not with normal types but with abnormal specimens; to use the language of old philosophy, not with what nature is striving to be, but with what by some lapse she has happened to become.

This art works by contrast. It enables you to see, it makes you see, the perfect type by painting the opposite deviation. It shows you what ought to be by what ought not to be; when complete, it reminds you of the perfect image, by showing you the distorted and imperfect image. Of this art we possess in the present generation one prolific master. Mr. Browning is an artist working by incongruity. Possibly hardly one of his most considerable efforts can be found which is not great because of its odd

mixture. He puts together things which no one else would have put together, and produces on our minds a result which no one else would have produced, or tried to produce. His admirers may not like all we may have to say of him. But in our way we too are among his admirers. No one ever read him without seeing not only his great ability but his great *mind*. He not only possesses superficial useable talents, but the strong something, the inner secret something, which uses them and controls them; he is great not in mere accomplishments, but in himself. He has applied a hard strong intellect to real life; he has applied the same intellect to the problems of his age. He has striven to know what *is*: he has endeavoured not to be cheated by counterfeits, not to be infatuated with illusions. His heart is in what he says. He has battered his brain against his creed till he believes it. He has accomplishments too, the more effective because they are mixed. He is at once a student of mysticism and a citizen of the world. He brings to the club-sofa distinct visions of old creeds, intense images of strange thoughts: he takes to the bookish student tidings of wild Bohemia, and little traces of the *demi-monde*. He puts down what is good for the naughty, and what is naughty for the good. Over women his easier writings exercise that imperious power which belongs to the writings of a great man of the world upon such matters. He knows women, and therefore they wish to know him. If we blame many of Browning's efforts, it is in the interest of art, and not from a wish to hurt or degrade him.

If we wanted to illustrate the nature of grotesque art by an exaggerated instance, we should have selected a poem which the chance of late publica-

tion brings us in this new volume. Mr. Browning has undertaken to describe what may be called *mind in difficulties*—mind set to make out the universe under the worst and hardest circumstances. He takes 'Caliban,' not perhaps exactly Shakespeare's Caliban, but an analogous and worse creature; a strong thinking power, but a nasty creature—a gross animal, uncontrolled and unelevated by any feeling of religion or duty. The delineation of him will show that Mr. Browning does not wish to take undue advantage of his readers by a choice of nice subjects.

> 'Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,
> Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
> With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin,
> And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
> And feels about his spine small eft-things course,
> Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh:
> And while above his head a pompion plant,
> Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,
> Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,
> And now a flower drops with a bee inside,
> And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch,—'

This pleasant creature proceeds to give his idea of the origin of the Universe, and it is as follows. Caliban speaks in the third person, and is of opinion that the maker of the Universe took to making it on account of his personal discomfort :—

> 'Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!
> 'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.
>
> 'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,
> But not the stars; the stars came otherwise;
> Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:
> Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
> And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.
>
> 'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease:
> He hated that He cannot change His cold,

Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish
That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,
And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine
O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,
A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave ;
Only, she ever sickened, found repulse
At the other kind of water, not her life,
(Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun)
Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,
And in her old bounds buried her despair,
Hating and loving warmth alike : so He.

' 'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,
Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing.
Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech ;
Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,
That floats and feeds ; a certain badger brown
He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye
By moonlight ; and the pie with the long tongue
That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,
And says a plain word when she finds her prize,
But will not eat the ants ; the ants themselves
That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks
About their hole—He made all these and more,
Made all we see, and us, in spite : how else ? ' [1]

It may seem perhaps to most readers that these lines are very difficult, and that they are unpleasant. And so they are. We quote them to illustrate, not the *success* of grotesque art, but the *nature* of grotesque art. It shows the end at which this species of art aims, and if it fails it is from over-boldness in the choice of a subject by the artist, or from the defects of its execution. A thinking faculty more in difficulties—a great type—an inquisitive, searching intellect under more disagreeable conditions, with worse helps, more likely to find falsehood, less likely to find truth, can scarcely be imagined. Nor is the mere description of the thought at all bad : on the contrary, if we closely examine it, it is very clever. Hardly any one could have amassed so

[1] ' Caliban upon Setebos.'

many ideas at once nasty and suitable. But scarcely any readers—any casual readers—who are not of the sect of Mr. Browning's admirers will be able to examine it enough to appreciate it.

From a defect, partly of subject, and partly of style, many of Mr. Browning's works make a demand upon the reader's zeal and sense of duty to which the nature of most readers is unequal. They have on the turf the convenient expression 'staying power': some horses can hold on and others cannot. But hardly any reader not of especial and peculiar nature can hold on through such composition. There is not enough of 'staying power' in human nature. One of his greatest admirers once owned to us that he seldom or never began a new poem without looking on in advance, and foreseeing with caution what length of intellectual adventure he was about to commence. Whoever will work hard at such poems will find much mind in them: they are a sort of quarry of ideas, but whoever goes there will find these ideas in such a jagged, ugly, useless shape that he can hardly bear them.

We are not judging Mr. Browning simply from a hasty, recent production. All poets are liable to misconceptions, and if such a piece as 'Caliban upon Setebos' were an isolated error, a venial and particular exception, we should have given it no prominence. We have put it forward because it just elucidates both our subject and the characteristics of Mr. Browning. But many other of his best-known pieces do so almost equally; what several of his devotees think his best piece is quite enough illustrative for anything we want. It appears that on Holy Cross day at Rome the Jews were obliged to listen to a Christian sermon in the hope of their conversion, though this is, according to Mr.

Browning, what they really said when they came away :—

'Fee, faw, fum ! bubble and squeak !
Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week.
Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,
Stinking and savoury, smug and gruff,
Take the church-road, for the bell's due chime
Gives us the summons—'t is sermon-time !

'Boh, here's Barnabas ! Job, that's you ?
Up stumps Solomon—bustling too ?
Shame, man ! greedy beyond your years
To handsel the bishop's shaving-shears ?
Fair play's a jewel ! Leave friends in the lurch ?
Stand on a line ere you start for the church !

'Higgledy, piggledy, packed we lie,
Rats in a hamper, swine in a stye,
Wasps in a bottle, frogs in a sieve,
Worms in a carcase, fleas in a sleeve.
Hist ! square shoulders, settle your thumbs,
And buzz for the bishop—here he comes.'

And after similar nice remarks for a church, the edified congregation concludes :—

'But now, while the scapegoats leave our flock,
And the rest sit silent and count the clock,
Since forced to muse the appointed time
On these precious facts and truths sublime,—
Let us fitly employ it, under our breath,
In saying Ben Ezra's Song of Death.

'For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,
Called sons and sons' sons to his side,
And spoke, "This world has been harsh and strange;
Something is wrong : there needeth a change.
But what, or where ? at the last, or first ?
In one point only we sinned, at worst.

'"The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,
And again in his border see Israel set.
When Judah beholds Jerusalem,
The stranger-seed shall be joined to them :
To Jacob's House shall the Gentiles cleave.
So the Prophet saith and his sons believe.

' " Ay, the children of the chosen race
Shall carry and bring them to their place:
In the land of the Lord shall lead the same,
Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame,
When the slaves enslave, the oppressed ones o'er
The oppressor triumph for evermore?

' " God spoke, and gave us the word to keep,
Bade never fold the hands nor sleep
'Mid a faithless world,—at watch and ward,
Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.
By His servant Moses the watch was set:
Though near upon cock-crow, we keep it yet.

' " Thou! if Thou wast He, who at mid-watch came,
By the starlight, naming a dubious name!
And if, too heavy with sleep—too rash
With fear—O Thou, if that martyr gash
Fell on Thee coming to take Thine own.
And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne—

' " Thou art the Judge. We are bruisèd thus;
But, the judgment over, join sides with us!
Thine too is the cause! and not more thine
Than ours, is the work of these dogs and swine,
Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed!
Who maintain Thee in word, and defy Thee in deed!

' " We withstood Christ then? be mindful how
At least we withstand Barabbas now!
Was our outrage sore? But the worst we spared,
To have called those—Christians, had we dared!
Let defiance to them pay mistrust of Thee,
And Rome make amends for Calvary!

' " By the torture, prolonged from age to age,
By the infamy, Israel's heritage,
By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace,
By the badge of shame, by the felon's place,
By the branding-tool, the bloody whip,
And the summons to Christian fellowship,—

' " We boast our proof that at least the Jew
Would wrest Christ's name from the Devil's crew.
Thy face took never so deep a shade
But we fought them in it, God our aid!
A trophy to bear, as we march, thy band
South, East, and on to the Pleasant Land!" '[1]

[1] 'Holy Cross Day:' stanzas 1–3, 11–20.

It is very natural that a poet whose wishes incline, or whose genius conducts, him to a grotesque art, should be attracted towards mediæval subjects. There is no age whose legends are so full of grotesque subjects, and no age whose real life was so fit to suggest them. Then, more than at any other time, good principles have been under great hardships. The vestiges of ancient civilisation, the germs of modern civilisation, the little remains of what had been, the small beginnings of what is, were buried under a cumbrous mass of barbarism and cruelty. Good elements hidden in horrid accompaniments are the special theme of grotesque art, and these mediæval life and legends afford more copiously than could have been furnished before Christianity gave its new elements of good, or since modern civilisation has removed some few at least of the old elements of destruction. A *buried* life like the spiritual mediæval was Mr. Browning's natural element, and he was right to be attracted by it. His mistake has been that he has not made it pleasant; that he has forced his art to topics on which no one could charm, or on which he, at any rate, could not; that on these occasions and in these poems he has failed in fascinating men and women of sane taste.

We say 'sane,' because there is a most formidable and estimable *insane* taste. The will has great though indirect power over the taste, just as it has over the belief. There are some horrid beliefs from which human nature revolts, from which at first it shrinks, to which, at first, no effort can force it. But if we fix the mind upon them they have a power over us just because of their natural offensiveness. They are like the sight of human blood: experienced soldiers tell us that at first men are sickened by the smell and newness of blood almost to death and

fainting, but that as soon as they harden their hearts and stiffen their minds, as soon as they *will* bear it, then comes an appetite for slaughter, a tendency to gloat on carnage, to love blood, at least for the moment, with a deep, eager love. It is a principle that if we put down a healthy instinctive aversion, Nature avenges herself by creating an unhealthy insane attraction. For this reason, the most earnest truth-seeking men fall into the worst delusions; they will not let their mind alone; they force it towards some ugly thing, which a crochet of argument, a conceit of intellect recommends, and Nature punishes their disregard of her warning by subjection to the ugly one, by belief in it. Just so the most industrious critics get the most admiration. They think it unjust to rest in their instinctive natural horror: they overcome it, and angry Nature gives them over to ugly poems and marries them to detestable stanzas.

Mr. Browning possibly, and some of the worst of Mr. Browning's admirers certainly, will say that these grotesque objects exist in real life, and therefore they ought to be, at least may be, described in art. But though pleasure is not the end of poetry, pleasing is a condition of poetry. An exceptional monstrosity of horrid ugliness cannot be made pleasing, except it be made to suggest—to recall—the perfection, the beauty, from which it is a deviation. Perhaps in extreme cases no art is equal to this; but then such self-imposed problems should not be worked by the artist; these out-of-the-way and detestable subjects should be let alone by him. It is rather characteristic of Mr. Browning to neglect this rule. He is the most of a realist, and the least of an idealist, of any poet we know. He evidently sympathises with some part at least of Bishop Blougram's apology.

Anyhow this world exists. 'There *is* good wine—there *are* pretty women—there *are* comfortable benefices—there *is* money, and it is pleasant to spend it. Accept the creed of your age and you get these, reject that creed and you lose them. And for what do you lose them? For a fancy creed of your own, which no one else will accept, which hardly any one will call a "creed," which most people will consider a sort of unbelief.'

Again, Mr. Browning evidently loves what we may call the realism, the grotesque realism, of orthodox Christianity. Many parts of it in which great divines have felt keen difficulties are quite pleasant to him. He must *see* his religion, he must have an 'object-lesson' in believing. He must have a creed that will *take*, which wins and holds the miscellaneous world, which stout men will heed, which nice women will adore. The spare moments of solitary religion—the 'obdurate questionings,' the high 'instincts,' the 'first affections,' the 'shadowy recollections,'

> 'Which, do they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain-light of all our day—
> Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;'[1]

the great but vague faith—the unutterable tenets—seem to him worthless, visionary; they are not enough 'immersed in matter;'[2] they move about 'in worlds not realised.' We wish he could be tried like the prophet once; he would have found God in the earthquake and the storm; he would have deciphered from them a bracing and a rough religion: he would have known that crude men and ignorant women felt them too, and he would accord-

[1] Wordsworth: 'Intimations of Immortality,' ix.
[2] Locke. See vol. ii. p. 73 n., *infra*.

ingly have trusted them; but he would have distrusted and disregarded the 'still small voice': he would have said it was 'fancy'—a thing you thought you heard to-day, but were not sure you had heard to-morrow: he would call it a nice illusion, an immaterial prettiness; he would ask triumphantly, 'How are you to get the mass of men to heed this little thing?' he would have persevered and insisted '*My wife* does not hear it.'

But although a suspicion of beauty and a taste for ugly reality have led Mr. Browning to exaggerate the functions and to caricature the nature of grotesque art, we own, or rather we maintain, that he has given many excellent specimens of that art within its proper boundaries and limits. Take an example, his picture of what we may call the *bourgeois* nature in *difficulties*; in the utmost difficulty, in contact with magic and the supernatural. He has made of it something homely, comic, true; reminding us of what *bourgeois* nature really is. By showing us the type under abnormal conditions, he reminds us of the type under its best and most satisfactory conditions:—

'Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its walls on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

'Rats!
They fought the dogs, and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cook's own ladles,

Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

'At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
"'Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy;
And as for our Corporation—shocking,
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you're old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"
And at this the Mayor and the Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.'

A person of musical abilities proposes to extricate the civic dignitaries from the difficulty, and they promise him a thousand guilders if he does.

'Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eye twinkled,
Like a candle-flame when salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling:
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling,
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—
Followed the Piper for their lives.

From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser,
  Wherein all plunged and perished !
—Save one who, stout as Julius Cæsar,
Swam across and lived to carry
  (As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary :
Which was, " At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
Into a cider-press's gripe :
And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
And a drawing the corks of train-oil flasks,
And a breaking the hoops of butter casks :
And it seemed as if a voice
  (Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
Is breathed) called out, ' Oh rats, rejoice !
  The world is grown to one vast drysaltery !
So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon ! '
And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
All ready staved, like a great sun shone
Glorious scarce an inch before me,
Just as methought it said, ' Come bore me ! '
—I found the Weser rolling o'er me."

' You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
" Go," said the Mayor, " and get long poles,
Poke out the nests and block up the holes !
Consult with carpenters and builders,
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats ! " when suddenly up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a " First, if you please, my thousand guilders ! "

' A thousand guilders ! The Mayor looked blue ;
So did the Corporation too ;
For council dinners made rare havoc
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock ;
And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
With a gipsy coat of red and yellow !
" Beside," quoth the Mayor, with a knowing wink,
" Our business was done at the river's brink ;

We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
From the duty of giving you something for drink,
And a matter of money to put in your poke ;
But as for the guilders, what we spoke
Of them, as you very well know, was in joke ;
Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
A thousand guilders ! Come, take fifty ! "

' The Piper's face fell, and he cried,
" No trifling ! I can't wait, beside !
I've promised to visit by dinner-time
Bagdat, and accept the prime
Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,
For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
Of a nest of scorpions no survivor :
With him I proved no bargain-driver,
With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver !
And folks who put me in a passion
May find me pipe to another fashion."

' " How ? " cried the Mayor, " d'ye think I brook
Being worse treated than a Cook ?
Insulted by a lazy ribald
With idle pipe and vesture piebald ?
You threaten us, fellow ? Do your worst,
Blow your pipe there till you burst ! "

' Once more he stept into the street,
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane ;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,
Out came the children running.
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

. . . . . .

'And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there's a tribe
Of alien people that ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they don't understand.' [1]

Something more we had to say of Mr. Browning, but we must stop. It is singularly characteristic of this age that the poems which rise to the surface should be examples of ornate art, and grotesque art, not of pure art. We live in the realm of the *half* educated. The number of readers grows daily, but the quality of readers does not improve rapidly. The middle class is scattered, heedless; it is well-meaning, but aimless; wishing to be wise, but ignorant how to be wise. The aristocracy of England never was a literary aristocracy, never even in the days of its full power, of its unquestioned predominance, did it guide—did it even seriously try to guide—the taste of England. Without guidance young men, and tired men, are thrown amongst a mass of books; they have to choose which they like; many of them would much like to improve their culture, to chasten their taste, if they knew how. But left to themselves they take, not pure art, but showy art; not that which permanently relieves the eye and makes it happy whenever it looks, and as long as it looks, but *glaring* art which catches and arrests the eye for a moment, but which in the end fatigues it. But before the wholesome remedy of nature—the fatigue arrives—the hasty reader has passed on to some new excitement, which in its turn

[1] 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin: a Child's Story.'

stimulates for an instant, and then is passed by for ever.

These conditions are not favourable to the due appreciation of pure art—of that art which must be known before it is admired—which must have fastened irrevocably on the brain before you appreciate it—which you must love ere it will seem worthy of your love. Women too, whose voice on literature counts as well as that of men—and in a light literature counts for more than that of men—women, such as we know them, such as they are likely to be, ever prefer a delicate unreality to a true or firm art. A dressy literature, an exaggerated literature seem to be fated to us. These are our curses, as other times had theirs.

> 'And yet
> Think not the living times forget.
> Ages of heroes fought and fell
> That Homer in the end might tell;
> O'er grovelling generations past
> Upstood the Doric fane at last;
> And countless hearts on countless years
> Had wasted thoughts, and hopes, and fears,
> Rude laughter and unmeaning tears;
> Ere England Shakespeare saw, or Rome
> The pure perfection of her dome.
> Others, I doubt not, if not we,
> The issue of our toils shall see;
> Young children gather as their own
> The harvest that the dead had shown,[1]
> The dead forgotten and unknown.'[2]

[1] 'sown.'

[2] *The Poems and Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough*, vol. ii. p. 472.

END OF VOL. I.

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